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**THE INFLUENCE OF PERCEIVED STUDENT POVERTY ON SCHOOL  
COUNSELOR RATINGS OF CLIENT DISTURBANCE AND ATTRACTIVENESS**

A Dissertation in  
Counselor Education

by

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of perceived student poverty and academic preparation on school counselor ratings of student disturbance and attractiveness. Student disturbance and attractiveness are key indicators of the quality of the counseling relationship and working alliance. One hundred and seventy-three professional school counselors were sampled using convenience methods from on-line newsletters and discussion boards sponsored by professional organizations. Participants were presented with a case scenario including two documents, a new student registration form and student transcript, that were used to manipulate the independent variables student poverty and academic achievement.

Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was used to compare the mean differences of the dependent measure scores client disturbance and attractiveness while controlling for variance associated with gender and race/ethnicity. Results of this analysis found two main effects pertaining to the measure of the client attractiveness variable. First, school counselors were more likely to find students whom they perceived as poor attractive as clients. Second, school counselors were less likely to find students attractive as clients whom they perceived as less prepared academically.

There has been little empirical study of the school counseling relationship and factors that contribute to a strong working alliance. This study suggests that counselor perceptions of status variables may impact their attraction to working with students. Limitations of this study and implications for practice and future research are discussed.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Issues of social class are a frequent topic in counseling literature, particularly publications pertaining to school counseling. Recent journal articles (Bemak, 2005; Brinson, Brew, & Denby, 2008; Trusty, & Niles, 2004; Trusty, Robinson, Plata, & Ng, 2000), texts (Pederson, & Carey, 2003; Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001), and professional codes and standards (American School Counselor Association, 2005; CACREP, 2001) abound with references to the underprivileged, poverty, socioeconomic indicators, and achievement gaps. In the school counseling field, much of the empirical evidence relating to social class has focused on student self-reported experiences or outcomes (Ackerman, Brown, & Izard, 2004; Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). The present study brings focus to the influence of perceived student poverty on school counselor reactions that influence the counseling relationship and student outcomes.

#### *Social Class and School Counselor Preparation*

Preparing counselors to work in a diverse, pluralistic society has been a primary focus of the counselor education profession for much of the past four decades (D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991; D'Andrea & Heckman, 2008). Traditionally, counselor education training programs have focused on developing counselor awareness and knowledge along such variables such as gender, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, and social class (Brinson, Brew, & Denby, 2008; Constantine, 2002). Of these multicultural variables, there remains a paucity of empirical and theoretical support related to social class (Constantine, 2002; Liu, Ali, et al., 2004; Munley et al., 2002). Multicultural competence is of particular importance to the training of school counselors because state compulsory education laws ensure that the profession will serve every

demographic segment of the United States population with the exception of those outside compulsory education age ranges (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2008).

While numerous authors have focused on aspects of social class in previous studies, the lack of attention towards this topic in the school counseling profession is exemplified by two recent publications. Holcomb-McCoy (2004) introduced a 51-item checklist of competencies designed to assess school counselor multicultural competence. The checklist was developed by conducting a theme analysis of multicultural school counseling literature. Of the 51 competency items included in this instrument, none involved social class or any derivative of the construct. Even more recently, a prolific social class scholar (see Liu, Fridman, & Hall, 2008) found no relevant empirical school counseling literature addressing social class after conducting an extensive literature search to support a book chapter pertaining to the topic. These two examples support the notion that social class has long been acknowledged as important in understanding a client's experience and the counseling dynamic, but remains a variable long neglected empirically, theoretically, and in training paradigms (Carter, 1991; Constantine, 2002; Frable, 1997; Liu, Ali, et al., 2004).

#### *Defining Poverty, Socioeconomic Status, and Social Class*

The dearth of attention towards social class in the school counseling profession can be connected to three factors. These are a lack of specificity when using terms connoting social status, multiple perspectives on conceptualizing this construct, and an inherent difficulty operationalizing social status variables for research purposes. Evidence of the first factor was found by Liu, Ali, et al. (2004). The authors conducted a content analysis of three counseling journals (*Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development*) spanning the years 1981-2000. In all, three thousand

nine hundred and fifteen articles were reviewed. Of these articles, 710 (18.1%) used language referring to social class in some context. The key finding was that 448 different words were identified as describing social class in the articles reviewed. The authors concluded a common lexicon was needed for researchers to intentionally study the construct of social class; particularly the study of class on an individual intra-psychic level.

For the purpose of this study, three terms are used that refer to socioeconomic/social class status. *Poverty* is a calculation designed to identify the threshold at which a family's resources do not meet their basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing expenses. The calculation is designed to assist in making policy decisions and has no intrinsic value on its own (Fisher, 1992). *Socioeconomic status* represents a calculation that expands upon the income threshold model of poverty by attempting to measure a person or family's access to resources including goods, services, information, and social connection that are valued by a society. While there is no general agreement among social scientists as to which variables and/or combinations of variables should be used to group socioeconomic classes, the most common variables used to do so are income, education, and occupation (APA, 2007). *Social class* is a term that represents a recent call in psychology to extend the understanding of social status so that issues of lifestyle, power, and prestige are included (in addition to the variables income, education, and occupation) in the scientific conceptualization of a person or family's standing. This concept represents a phenomenological approach to understanding and measuring social standing (Liu et al., 2004; Flores, 2009).

Given these definitions, one can subsume the concept of poverty within that of socioeconomic status and, in turn, the concept of socioeconomic status within that of social class. Each subsequent concept builds upon the previous to add a richer conceptualization of social

standing. In this paper, the term social class is used when discussing the general thematic issues of social standing in United States society. The terms poverty and socioeconomic status are used to discuss issues limited in scope to the definitions provided in the previous paragraph or when the specific study being discussed assumes the definitional viewpoint of either. Lastly, the focus of this study was on perceived student poverty (described as poor/non-poor in the discussion of the study design). Words such as poverty are ubiquitous in the United States lexicon, and therefore, generally elicit a sense of unique intrapsychic meaning (Liu, Ali et al., 2004; Liu, Fridman, & Hall, 2008; Liu, Soleck et al., 2004). This study will aim to provide each participant with factors designed to create different conceptualizations of social class in order to trigger each participant's intrapsychic perception of poverty. In summary, this study assumed a social class perspective towards participant conceptualization of poverty.

### *Conceptualizing Social Class*

Existing literature primarily approaches the study of social class from one of two perspectives. The socioeconomic status/objective perspective focuses on group-level phenomena through the organization of populations into strata based upon variables such as income, education, and occupation (Entwisle & Astone, 1994; Hauser, 1994). There are certainly cases when group stratification by socioeconomic status constructs fit the purpose of a school counseling study. For example, several studies have examined educational and occupational attainment differences within the context of social class (Trusty, 1999; Trusty & Niles, 2003; Trusty & Niles, 2004; Trusty, Robinson, Plata, & Ng, 2000). The socioeconomic status perspective is often appropriate for understanding the social milieu in which counselors and psychologists work.

There are also cases when this traditional approach to measuring socioeconomic status falls short. For the school counseling profession, this perspective fails to address several fundamental issues including the fact that (a) social class may vary over time (Bornstein, Hahn, Suwalsky, & Haynes, 2003; Duncan & Magnuson, 2003); (b) race, ethnicity, gender, and social class are often concurrent aspects of a person's experience (Constantine, 2002; Harley, Jolivette, McCormick, and Tice, 2002); and (c) that traditional socioeconomic phenomena are adult-centric despite the fact that research shows that children and adolescents experience awareness of class as well as classism (Carter, 2003; Goldberg, Gorn, Peracchio, & Bamossy, 2003; Goodman, et al., 2000; Roberts, Tanner, & Manolis, 2005; Tudor, 1971).

There is a second perspective, that of conceptualizing social class, to consider. Liu, Ali, et al. (2004) suggest that social class can be best understood by counselors if it is approached as a psychological/subjective framework. In this context, social class is operationalized as a phenomenological construct determined by a person's point-of-view or perception sans any social or environmental influence. According to Liu et al. a phenomenological approach is better suited to help explain people's motives, behaviors, and biases related to social class while also eliminating the focus on objective variables that may change over time or in different circumstances. This study will incorporate both perspectives on social class by prompting the research subject's phenomenological perspective on a client's class within the framework of an objective study design.

Finally, there are a number of ways that social class has been conceptualized and measured in the counseling literature ranging, from societal level measures of income distribution and inequality, to community level measures such as median income, unemployment, and educational attainment, to individual level criterion such as personal

educational attainment, occupational title, and income. Each of these captures a different dimension of social class stratification. The problem lies in the inconsistency with which these measures are employed for research in the field (APA, 2007). The most common method of determining socioeconomic status in the individual counseling field has been the combination of education and occupational factors in an index such as the Hollingshead or Duncan Indices of Social Position (Oakes & Rossi, 2003). Scholars acknowledge that these measures are both outdated and lack the nuance needed to incorporate the phenomenological view of social class as it is currently evolving in the literature (APA; Liu, Ali, et al., 2004).

Despite the limitations inherent in studying issues of social class in the school counseling profession, current literature illuminates a need for deeper understanding of class, including poverty, and its impact on student development and the school counseling relationship.

#### *A Rationale for Studying Poverty and the School Counseling Relationship*

Poverty is widely considered one point of social class demarcation (APA, 2007). Research shows that poverty impacts student development in a myriad of ways. First, there is a strong negative relationship between poverty and student health/wellness. Studies have shown that access to health care (McGinnis, Williams-Russo, & Knickman, 2002), exposure to environmental toxins (APA), poor health related choices (Macintyre, Maciver, & Sooman, 1993), increased exposure to stress (Lachman & Weaver, 1998), and increased psychological distress (Gallo & Matthews, 2003) all relate poorly to socioeconomic indicators. Second, social development is closely related to class and perceptions of class. Americans tend to perceive poverty and wealth status as an indication of personal attributes or worth (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). Some have found that this contributes to an inequity of support for programs designed to benefit the poor and reduce inequalities such as the achievement gap (Limbert &



Bullock, 2005). Third, child development has been shown to be deleteriously impacted by poverty. Research has shown that parenting styles (McLoyd, 1998; Morrison & Eccles, 1999), exposure to cognitive stimulation (Bradley, Corwyn, McAdoo, & Garcia Coll, 2001), and the propensity to develop symptoms of psychopathology (Costello, Comptom, Keeler, & Angold, 2003) are all negatively impacted by childhood poverty. All of these issues fall under the purview of the school counselor and their part in encouraging the personal/social, academic, and career development of students (ASCA, 2005).

Several authors (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Lee, 2005; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007) have written about the unique challenges school counselors face when working with students living in poverty. Included among these challenges are the achievement gap, school climate issues that impact students, resource deficits, a cultural gap between students/families living in poverty and the school, and the *blame game* where school personnel hold students and parents accountable for a lack of adjustment or achievement. In a school counseling relationship, the presence and/or severity of these factors could be impacted by school counselor attitudes, either explicitly or implicitly motivated towards the student.

Few studies investigate the influence of client social class on counselor reactions. The research that does exist indicates that lower social class clients do not find the same levels of access, attention from the counselor, therapeutic satisfaction, or benefit that higher class clients' experience. Although these conclusions might make intuitive sense, it is important to note that the studies examined in this section were all conducted in the 1980s and only three such studies (Hillerbrand, 1988; Lee and Ekstrom, 1987; Sladen, 1982) were found after an extensive literature review.

The evidence provided thus far suggests a need for further study of the influence of student poverty status on the counselors' reaction to clients in school counseling relationships. These reactions, as measured by ratings of client disturbance and attractiveness, may suggest counselor bias towards school students that would impact their ability to develop and maintain helping relationships. There is little in the literature to suggest that this topic has been thoroughly explored or that school counselors receive appropriate training to combat this bias if it indeed exists. My study is particularly important because school counselors are in position within the school structure to intercede on behalf of students living in poverty, but counselors may be reluctant to do so because of the presence of social class bias.

#### *Research Question*

This live analog study used a case scenario and supporting documents to manipulate the two independent variables identified below. Participants were practicing school counselors who work full-time in a school or district serving any combinations of the grades 6-12. The participants were recruited through a number of on-line list-servs, electronic newsletters, and school counseling organization membership lists. These Internet-based recruitment sources are enumerated in Chapter 3. The total sample recruited for this study was 173 school counselors who met the inclusion criteria. The dependent variables for the present study were (a) counselor assessment of client disturbance and (b) counselor assessment of attractiveness to working with the client. The independent variables were perceived (a) student poverty status defined as either poor or non-poor and (b) student academic preparation to be defined as either modest academic preparation or accomplished academic preparation. Covariates analyzed for inclusion in this study were (a) participant race/ethnicity, (b) participant gender, (c) participant social class

background, and (d) participant perception of school social class standing. The research question for the study was:

Are there differences and/or interaction effects in counselor perceptions of student client disturbance and/or counselor desire to work with student clients based upon student poverty status and educational preparation when controlling for counselor race/ethnicity, counselor gender, counselor social class background, and counselor perception of their school's social class?

### *Definition of Terms*

The following definitions of terms for this study are offered for clarification:

Cross-cultural Counseling: Cross-cultural counseling is a term that describes the counseling interaction between two distinct cultures or cultural beings. It is important to note that the terms multicultural and cross-cultural counseling are often used interchangeably in counseling literature to describe the exchange that occurs between two distinct cultural beings in a counseling relationship. Technically, the term multicultural means many cultures and, when paired with the term counseling, connotes either a broad social movement in the counseling profession or the presence of multiple cultures in a counseling session (couples or group therapy). This study purposefully takes a cross-cultural counseling perspective for two reasons: 1) this study is making the dualistic cultural distinction between poor and non-poor clients, and 2) the study is using the dyadic counseling relationship as the context for research (Leong and Van de Vijver, 2006).

Culture: Samovar and Porter (1997) define culture as “the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles,

spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving” (pp. 12-13).

Phenomenology/Phenomenological: Phenomenology is a philosophical perspective towards understanding human nature. In its broadest definition, it is the study of the relationship between human consciousness and the objects of that consciousness. In research, a phenomenological perspective attempts to understand a person’s behavior and/or attitude based on how things seem to the subject; versus believing that there is a truth (positivist) or social construction to behaviors and attitudes (Ashworth & Chung, 2006).

Poverty: A calculation designed to identify the threshold at which a family’s resources do not meet their basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing expenses. The calculation is designed to assist in making policy decisions and has no intrinsic value on its own (Fisher, 1992). The most common poverty measure used in the United States is determined by U.S. Census Bureau by comparing household size and income with the consumer price index (APA, 2007).

Social Class: Social class is defined by Brown, Fukunaga, Umemoto, and Wicker (1996) as “a status hierarchy associated with levels and types of economic resources, social valuation, and access to societal control and influence, with no one dimension being sufficient to reliably indicate social class.” (p. 159). There are two prevailing operational perspectives towards social class. The sociological perspective views this construct as a measurable variable; often looking at such data as income, educational attainment, and/or occupational title to determine one’s class designation (Liu, Ali, et al., 2004). The term social class is also defined from a phenomenological perspective which assumes that social class operates at an individual and subjective level in people’s lives and a) shapes his or her reality in addition to b) causing them to

seek congruency between their personal worldview and the demands of their perceived economic culture (Liu, Soleck, Hopps, Dunston, & Pickett, 2004, p. 103-104).

Socioeconomic Status: A calculation that stratifies a person or family's social status through the measurement of their access to resources including goods, services, information, and social connection that are valued by a society. While there is no general agreement among social scientists as to which variables and/or combinations of variables should be used to group socioeconomic classes, the most common variables used to do so are income, education, and occupation (APA, 2007).

### *Limitations*

The limitations of this study are:

1. The analog design of the study curtails external validity and, therefore, limits generalizability.
2. The use of correlational statistical procedures will allow relationships to be suggested but not causality.
3. The sample for the study will be one of convenience which may result in a lack of representativeness along the variable included in the study (e.g. fewer counselors who have worked with significant number of students living in poverty than in the actual population).
4. The instruments available for measuring the constructs of client disturbance and attraction are limited. The Counselor Reaction Form (CRF) is an instrument that has been used in similar research (analogue designs) but in few studies and with a different population (college aged- clients and psychologists).

5. Little research exists regarding the influence of social class or poverty on the counselor/client relationship. This limits the ability to ensure that study variables and covariates are reflective of all significant variables that influence this relationship.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

This second chapter details the evidence identified in the professional literature pertaining to the influence of perceived student poverty on school counselor reactions as they may impact the counseling relationship.

Preparing counselors to work in a diverse, pluralistic society has been a primary focus of the counselor education profession for much of the past four decades (D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991; D'Andrea & Heckman, 2008). Traditionally counselor education training programs have focused on developing counselor awareness and knowledge along such variables such as gender, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, and social class (Brinson, Brew, & Denby, 2008; Constantine, 2002). Of these multicultural variables, there remains a paucity of empirical and theoretical support related to poverty and social class (Constantine; Liu, Ali, et al., 2004; Munley, et al., 2002).

While research investigating the influence of cross-cultural factors in the counseling relationship dates back to the late 1960's (Goldberg & Tidwell, 1990), the preponderance of these studies have focused on investigating the cultural factors of race/ethnicity and gender. The context of this line of research has primarily been in the area of mental health counseling with adult clients although a few studies of this type have been conducted with school-age clients (Gamst, Dana, Der-Karabetian, & Maramba, 2004; Goldberg & Tidwell). The study of the cross-cultural school counseling relationship is very limited, possibly because much of the empirical evidence found in the literature comes from the field of counseling psychology.

In 2005, 12.7 percent of the United States population or 37 million citizens lived below the poverty threshold of \$20,000 per year for a household of four living in the forty-eight

contiguous states (DeNaves-Walt, Proctor, & Lee, 2006). In the past ten plus years, the top 5% of income earners in the U.S. have experienced considerable growth in their incomes while the bottom 5 percent have suffered from income stagnation. When inflation is accounted for it appears that the wealthy are becoming more so while the poor are getting poorer. (APA, 2007). These trends have an effect on school age populations. Between 2000 and 2007, the poverty rate for people under 18 years of age had risen from 16.2 percent to 18.0 percent respectively causing participation in school subsidized lunch programs to increase proportionately (U.S. Census, 2007). This increase in the number of lower social class students enrolled might strain both the school and school counselor's resources as they respond to the potential negative consequences associated with students' class status. It is school counselors who are in the position to provide appropriate service to lower social class students (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Lee, 2005; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007).

This study attempts to add to the professional body of knowledge regarding the influence of poverty on school counselor reactions to students as it might impact their relationship and propensity to help those students. In preparation for this study, this chapter includes a review of the literature pertaining to: (a) client cultural factors and counselor reaction research, (b) social class and the school counselor (c) theoretical perspectives on poverty, (d) the school counselor' role when working with students living in poverty, (e) poverty and school-age student development, (f) variables that are often concurrent with poverty, (g) limitations in this area of empirical inquiry, and (h) a summary of the findings that impact this study.

#### *Review of Client Cultural Factors and Counselor Reaction Research*

Samovar and Porter define culture as “the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations,



concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving” (1997, pp. 12-13). Traditionally, research that studies the influence of culture in the counseling relationship has focused on historically underrepresented groups designated by race, ethnicity, and gender. Several authors have argued that social class, including poverty, fits the criteria of a culture and should be treated thusly in the literature (Blustein, et al., 2002; Liu, Soleck, et al., 2004; Prilleltensky, 1997). The earlier cross-cultural studies of race, ethnicity, and gender provide a framework from which the study of social class and poverty may commence.

Counseling may be viewed as a process of interpersonal interaction in which verbal and nonverbal communication are sent and received by both parties involved: the counselor and client (Sue, 1977). Cultural variations in communication may lead to misunderstandings that inhibit the development of trust and rapport necessary to facilitate effective therapy. The most common result of these cultural misunderstandings is early termination of treatment (Tryon, Blackwell, & Hammel, 2007). The counselor is ethically bound (ACA, 2005) to mediate the impact of cultural difference in counseling based upon factors such as language barriers, class values, culture-bound values, nonverbal cues, personal space, eye contact, and conversation conventions (Sue, 1981).

The working alliance, or the affiliative collaboration between counselor and client, correlates consistently and positively to successful counseling outcomes as substantiated by decades of research (Castonguay, Constantino, & Holtforth, 2006). Several factors contribute to the quality and strength of the working alliance including client disturbance, experience level of therapist, length of therapy, scales of measurement, level of attraction between client and counselor, and type of therapeutic treatment (Tryon, Blackwell, & Hammel, 2007). Given the

sensitive nature of the therapeutic relationship and the ethical mandates of counselors to do no harm and maintain confidentiality, analogue studies have been widely used to study the impact of cultural factors on the therapeutic relationship. These studies do limit the factors available for measurement due to the nature of the therapeutic scenario versus an actual therapy session. In this case, perceived client disturbance and attractiveness to working with the client are two factors which can be reliably measured within the parameters of an analogue research design (Howell & Highlen, 1981; Tryon 1993; Tryon, 1999).

*Client Disturbance:* Client-counselor alliance is a core component of the counseling relationship and contributes greatly to therapeutic outcomes and client retention in treatment (Constantino, Castonguay, & Schut, 2002). Client disturbance is a key factor in influencing the quality of the working alliance as well as both client and counselor ratings of their relationship (Tryon, Blackwell, & Hammel, 2007). Disturbance is often inversely related to the maintenance of social relationships including the therapeutic relationship. Several studies have supported this thesis (Hersoug, Hogland, Monsen, & Havik, 2001; Zuroff et al., 2000) showing that increased client disturbance is correlated to poor alliance ratings. Research suggests that the high disturbance/low alliance phenomenon increases the likelihood of client unilateral disengagement from counseling (Lehman, & Salovey, 1990; Tryon, 1999) and decreases the counselor's feeling of self-efficacy in helping the client (Shueman, Gelso, Mindus, Hunt, & Stevenson, 1980).

Tryon (1999) provides an example of a study using the Counselor Reaction Form (CRF) to measure the effects of client disturbance on client termination patterns. Ratings were analyzed using multiple analyses of variance and main effects were subjected to univariate analyses of variance to evaluate the individual effects for disturbance and attraction (see below for attraction results). Clients rated as more disturbed by the counselor at intake were more likely to return for

a second session,  $M = 18.91$ ,  $SD = 3.57$ , than those rated as less disturbed,  $M = 13.69$ ,  $SD = 5.97$ ,  $F(1,255) = 76.14$ ,  $p < .0001$ . While this initial return to counseling may seem heartening, the results evaluating multiple session behaviors are not. Unilateral terminators after the second session were rated significantly higher on the disturbance scale,  $M = 19.67$ ,  $SD = 3.3$ , than those who attended sessions until mutual termination was agreed upon,  $M = 18.32$ ,  $SD = 3.68$ ,  $F(1, 146) = 5.34$ ,  $p < .03$ .

There are several potentially important factors to consider and apply to research in the school counseling milieu. First, research suggests the possibility that the cultural discontinuity between a poor student's home environment and that of the school can negatively impact a student's mental health or disturbance because of the middle class worldview exposed by school personnel (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). Secondly, school counselors often carry caseloads twice that of the recommendations of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005; NCES, 2008). Overwhelming caseloads may necessitate that counselors make choices regarding which students to which they devote time; choices that may be influenced by their feelings of working alliance as partially impacted by their perception of student disturbance. Finally, in many high schools clients can easily self-select out of meeting with the school counselor due to the two points enumerated above. It is important for school counselors to understand their own attitudes and behaviors as they may influence student engagement in their helping relationship. While there is little research pertaining specifically to the school counseling milieu, the available evidence suggests that further study of the impact of client disturbance on school counselor perceptions of student-clients is warranted.

*Client Attractiveness:* Attraction has been defined as the "direction and strength of the affect engendered between two participants in a dyad" along a continuum that ranges from

strongly positive to strongly negative (Byrne, 1961, p. 713). The study of attraction can be framed as one attempting to establish and detail the relationship between antecedents and consequential events. Several antecedents have been shown to have a strong correlation to interpersonal attraction including attitudinal similarity, economic status, and perceived social desirability (Byrne & Griffit, 1973).

Attraction is an important construct to consider when exploring the working alliance and counseling relationship. Studies have shown that counselors prefer to see clients to whom they are attracted (Garfield, 1986; Tryon & DeVito, 1980) and feel more able to help them (Lehman, & Salovey, 1990). Just like client disturbance, the author found no examples of research incorporating attraction as a variable in a school counseling relationship. Tryon (1999) used both the disturbance and attraction subscales of the CRF in a study of counseling drop-out for college-student clients. A key finding of this study along the attraction paradigm was that clients who returned after an initial session were found to be more attractive as clients ( $M = 16.52$ ,  $SD = 2.52$ ) than those who did not return for a second session ( $M = 14.39$ ,  $SD = 3.29$ ,  $F(1, 255) = 34.46$ ,  $p < .0001$ ).

Attraction research has proved to be of great interest to those studying the counseling relationship, specifically counselor reaction to client characteristics such as gender and racial match. Similarly to the disturbance information detailed above, the author found no evidence regarding the use of attraction paradigms in the student-client/ school counselor relationship. The compilation of existing evidence is strong enough to suggest that this is an area worthy of further study, particularly within the framework of understanding cultural differences in the school counseling relationship.

### *Social Class and the Counselor*

The use of social class as a contextual variable in studies related to counseling is very limited (Liu, Ali et al., 2004; Liu, Fridman, & Hall, 2008). In fact, an extensive literature review by the author found only one study of school counselor behaviors in which social class is a variable as well as two studies that explore social class as a variable in the college counseling relationship.

Lee and Ekstrom (1987) explored the equity of school guidance services. Using *High School and Beyond* nationally representative data from the years 1980 and 1982 that included 9,471 public high school students, the authors used regression analysis techniques to identify students who accessed two types of school counseling: 1) curriculum selection or program planning, and 2) career and college planning. Disadvantaged students (those from lower SES, small rural schools, and minority populations) were less likely to receive counselor assistance for track and program planning and therefore less likely to be found in academic program tracks than their higher social class peers. This naturally progresses to the finding that disadvantaged students receive less college planning counseling than their higher social class peers because they were not in the academic, college preparatory track. Importantly, the authors concluded that guidance counseling had a significant and positive causal effect on placement in the academic track which leads one to guess that counselors met more often with higher social class students than lower social class students. This might suggest the presence of counselor or school system bias towards lower social class students.

Hillerbrand (1988) studied the relationship between SES and counseling variables in relation to the client's presenting problem and therapy outcome using a sample of 163 participant counseling files from a large Midwestern university during the 1982-83 academic year. SES was

found to be related to the initial assessment and final disposition of each client. Lower SES clients were rated as more dysfunctional by the intake interviewer than middle class clients. Similarly, SES was positively correlated with the counselor's rating of success upon termination. More upper SES clients were rated as successful in obtaining their counseling goals (51%) than middle class clients (26%) and lower SES clients (23%). In terms of achieving counseling goals, lower social class clients were perceived as more dysfunctional at the beginning of the counseling process and were rated by the counselors as less successful at the end of the counseling process. This relationship between SES and counseling assessments could have been caused by the clients' presentation, the counselors' biases, or both.

In a third study, Sladen (1982) analyzed the effects of socioeconomic status and race on the client's perception of the counselor's empathy, attractiveness, and the client-counselor cognitive similarity. Sladen studied 12 white and 12 Black undergraduate males using the Hollingshead Two-Factor Index of Social Position to determine their socioeconomic status. There were no significant differences in social class ranking between the two groups. The research participants each listened to twelve audio tapes of counseling sessions and then completed rating instruments on the process variables. The findings suggest that subjects rated counselors highly in the categories of empathy, helpfulness, commitment, activity level, affirmation, attractiveness, and similarity in cognitive ability when the counselor's perceived social class matched the social class background of the client. It seems that a client's preference for a counselor of similar social class background might be based on the client's estimate of differences more so than actual differences (Sladen).

The limited research presented here indicates that lower social class clients do not find the same levels of access, therapeutic satisfaction, or benefit that higher class clients' experience

but that they might prefer counselors with similar class backgrounds. While these conclusions might make intuitive sense, it is important to note that the studies examined in this section were all conducted in the 1980's and only three such studies were found after an extensive literature review. These findings mirror a trend in psychology and counseling literature in that the topic of social class has lain dormant for many years only to see renewed interest in the past decade (Blustein et al., 2002; Flores, 2009; Liu, Ali et al., 2004; Liu, Fridman, & Hall, 2008; Liu, Soleck et al., 2004).

### *Theoretical Perspective on Social Class and Poverty*

Social class differences may be more profound than cultural differences in the counseling relationship (Nystul, 2003). Existing literature primarily approaches the study of social class from two perspectives. The objective/sociological perspective focuses on group-level phenomena through the organization of populations into strata based upon variables such as income, education, and occupation (Entwisle & Astone, 1994; Hauser, 1994; Hollingshead & Redlich, 1958). This perspective focuses on access to material and structural resources/capital and the relative status position one holds in a society based upon this access (APA, 2007). In counseling research, this social capital structure provides a context for understanding how resource/capital inequality impacts groups stratified by their social class position. For example, numerous studies correlate impoverished schools (those that lack resources such as books, toys, or computers) negatively with academic achievement, IQ scores, and postsecondary readiness (Hochschild, 2003; McLoyd, 1998). Similar negative correlations have been found for those living in poverty and their health (Belle & Douchet, 2003; Kawachi & Kennedy, 1999), educational attainment (Phillips & Chin, 2004), and overall welfare (Lott & Bullock, 2007).

There are cases when the objective/sociological approach to conceptualizing social class falls short. For the school counseling profession, this perspective fails to address several fundamental issues including the fact that social class may vary over time (Bornstein, Hahn, Suwalsky, & Haynes, 2003; Duncan & Magnuson, 2003), race, ethnicity, gender, and social class are often concurrent aspects of a person's experience (Constantine, 2002; Harley, Jolivette, McCormick, & Tice, 2002), and that traditional socioeconomic phenomena are adult-centric despite the fact that research shows that children and adolescents experience awareness of class as well as classism (Carter, 2003; Goldberg, Gorn, Peracchio, & Bamossy, 2003; Goodman, et al., 2000; Roberts, Tanner, & Manolis, 2005; Tudor, 1971).

While the objective/sociological perspective is important for understanding the social milieu in which counselors and psychologists work, there is a second perspective to consider. Liu, Soleck, et al. (2004) suggest that social class can be best understood in counseling relationships if it is approached as a psychological framework. This more subjective approach is better suited to help explain people's motives, behaviors, and biases related to social class while also eliminating the focus on potentially malleable objective variables.

The Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM) views perceptions, feelings, economic environments, and culture through the lens of social class (Liu, Soleck, et al., 2004). This phenomenological based model has been the subject of more than ten peer-reviewed publications and book chapters but as of yet has no empirical support. The model is based upon three assumptions:

1. Social class operates at an individual and subjective level in people's lives.



2. An individual's perceptions shape his or her reality. Hence, social class at the individual level is a socially constructed phenomenon derived from the individual's perception of the environment.
3. Individuals work toward homeostasis in their worldview. Individuals will seek congruency between the various domains of the SCWM as a way to cope with the demands and expectations of their economic culture and maximize their opportunities to accumulate the valued capital within that economic culture (Liu, Soleck at al., p. 103-104).

In the context of these assumptions, the model outlines five domains in which one develops their social class worldview. These domains are:

1. Consciousness, Attitudes, and Salience Domain - provides the context in which one becomes aware of their own social class. This context helps determine how one conceptualizes the class of others.
2. Referent Groups Domain- refers one's social class group of origin, peer/cohort group, and group of aspiration. These groups influence the development a person's social class worldview.
3. Property Relationship Domain – is comprised of the valued materials by which one defines their social class. These materials also help identify and exclude others who do not share the same class.
4. Lifestyle Domain – describes how a person organizes their time and resources to actualize their perceived social class standing.
5. Behaviors Domain – includes the class specific learned behaviors that perpetuate ones social class worldview (Liu, Soleck at al.).

The five domains described above concurrently create one's social class worldview. The nature of the individual is to strive for the accrual of cultural capital commiserate with their perceived social class and maintain homeostasis within their social class worldview, bias, and/or oppression is internalized (Liu, Soleck, et al.).

While there is some tension between the two perspectives presented here, both are essential to developing an understanding of social class in all its complexity. This study will attempt to marry the two perspectives by honoring each unique contribution to understanding the influence of poverty in the school counseling relationship. The study itself is designed to measure and stratify responses based upon group level phenomena therefore traditional measures of socioeconomic status are employed. The crux of the study is in the manipulation of each school counselor's perception regarding the poverty status of the student presented in the study. As discussed in Chapter 1, this manipulation of poverty status expands beyond the measured construct of poverty to the individual's intrapsychic perception of student poverty and the resulting biases that each individual attributes to that perception.

#### *The School Counselor Role when Working with Students Living in Poverty*

Counselors are mandated by their professional code of ethics to "actively attempt to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of the clients they serve." (ACA, 2005, p.4). The United States population is becoming more diverse elevating the need for counselors, including school counselors, to continually improve their multicultural competence (Hayes, 2008). Lee (2005) offers an overview of the challenges and competencies required to be effective as a school counselor in urban settings, particularly those that have a high concentration of poverty. He lucidly identifies the unique challenges of counseling in high poverty areas while recognizing that working with students in poverty is *different* than traditional school counseling. In order to

overcome the challenges inherent to poverty (including the achievement gap, teacher quantity and quality, school climate issues, and resource deficits among others) school counselors must assume a systemic, rather than individual, focus. This includes assuming leadership roles within their school systems, advocating for policy changes at multiple levels, and extending their leadership into the community. While the article focuses primarily on urban schools, the author notes that the competencies presented are important for school counselors working with students living in poverty in all types of school systems. The themes presented in this article resonate throughout the available poverty focused school counselor literature.

Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007) continued to clarify and refine the importance of the school counselor in working with students living in poverty. Leadership at multiple levels is defined by such roles as being a cultural bridge between students/families living in poverty and the school while also blocking the *blame game* that often occurs (teachers and administration blaming poor students for poor performance). This takes the view that teachers and schools see the poor from a deficit perspective and it is the counselor's role to mediate, model, and teach school personnel otherwise. The counselor is trying to retrain school administration and faculty to take a strength-based approach to their poor students thus mediating the bias inherent in the deficit approach. In the end, the goal is to provide a more family-centric school that welcomes and nurtures students from all social classes.

Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) introduce a communitycentric approach to involving low-income parents in schools. The authors note that income is positively correlated to parent participation in schools. This is of particular importance when one considers traditional achievement gaps between the poor and non-poor and the fact that parental involvement positively impacts student achievement, school attachment, and graduation rates. The question

posed is how can school counselors increase parental involvement for those children who most need these positive effects? Van Velsor and Orozco identify several types of barriers to low-income parent involvement including demographic barriers (such as inflexible work schedules, transportation problems, and increased pressure to care for children and older adults), psychological barriers (parents lack confidence in their own intelligence, perceived racism at school, and poor mental health associated with poverty), teacher attitudes (teacher bias towards low-income persons, cultural differences based on race, ethnicity and poverty), and school climate (the actions schools take to make the school welcoming to low-income persons).

School counselors are identified as those in the position to lead a school and design appropriate strategies for confronting these problems (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). The authors offer six *communitycentric* strategies for school counselors to employ with low-income students and their families:

1. Learn more about the families. This includes reaching out to families through notes home, telephone calls, and home visits. Counselors are also encouraged to train teachers to take these positive, proactive steps.
2. Learn more about the student's communities. This involves the identification of community leaders and service providers so that counselors can make connections to these key activists in the communities.
3. Help address community concerns. It is difficult for parents to be involved with their children's education when their concern is providing food, shelter, and basic health care to their children. The counselor's connection to leaders and service providers will help them accomplish this task.

4. Provide on-site services. These may include school centric services such as math night, ESL classes, family communication workshops or other topics of interest/need for the families including vaccinations or prenatal care.
5. Train school personnel. In-service programs tailored to helping teachers and staff meet the unique needs of poor students and increasing their multicultural competence will benefit all parties involved.
6. Recognize and use parent's cultural capital. Honoring resilience, strengths, and unique cultural viewpoint are all parts of working as a multiculturally competent counselor. Helping parents use these assets to help their children, the school, and the community accomplishes benefits both the parents and the school community.

This author's literature review found a forceful practice and theory oriented response to issues regarding the interaction between lower social class students/families and schools/school counselors. The energetic response to issues of class is not balanced in the literature by empirical articles designed to better understand the impact of social class on family/school interactions. More importantly for this discussion, there were no recent empirical studies found that investigated the impact of social class on the school counselor/student or school counselor/family dynamic.

#### *The Relationship between Social Class and Student Development*

Literature pertaining to student development offers multiple perspectives on conceptualizing constructs of social standing causing a lack of consistency in the terminology used. In this review of literature pertinent to this study, each article is described in the language of social standing chosen by that study's author(s). Therefore, regardless of the terminology used the overarching conceptual framework is that of social class, as described in Chapter 1, whereas

multiple levels of social standing (i.e. poverty and socioeconomic status) are subsumed within the larger concept of social class.

*Personal/Social Development:* There are several external factors associated with social class that impact a student's personal and social development as well as their readiness to succeed in all three developmental domains. Research shows that social class is positively correlated with child and adolescent psychological development (Evans, 2004; McLoyd, 1998) while being negatively correlated with psychological distress (Fiscella & Franks, 1997; Kessler & Cleary, 1980). In schools, poverty related psychological development deficits and distress are related to conduct problems (Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994), physical aggression (Ackerman, Brown, & Izard, 2004; Nagin & Tremblay, 2001), low-self-esteem and cognitive distress (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simmons, 1994; McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, & Borquez, 1994), and poor social competence (Garner, Jones, & Miner, 1994). In this domain, there is research differentiating the personal/social development of upper class students versus the middle class norm. This evidence found that higher class students are more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression, substance abuse, and body dysmorphia and/or eating disorders (Luthar & Latendresse, 2005a; Luthar & Latendresse, 2005b; Sanderson, Darley, & Messinger, 2002). In summary, the entire spectrum of social class is relevant when considering the personal/social development of students and its impact on their development in the other domains. However, students living in poverty environments often lack access to available resources through which they can overcome developmental hurdles.

*Academic Development:* Much of the research pertaining to secondary student academic development assumes a middle class "norm" and compares other classes, most often the poor and lower class, to this norm. If school counselors do not recognize this social class norm when

developing programs and interventions, there is a high likelihood that the students operating outside of the norm will be blamed for any failure to achieve within the middle class biased system (Liu, Fridman, & Hall, 2008).

Several authors have noted that lower social class students find the school environment unfavorable to academic achievement (Evans, 2004; McLoyd, 1998; Oates, 2003). Research of factors that contribute to lower social class achievement deficits can be organized into two groups. The first can be described as external (outside of the school) factors. Many students growing up in poverty experience environmental factors such as stress, violence, exposure to home-based toxins, and a lack of home-based cognitive stimulation, all of which limit a child's intellectual and socioemotional development (Costello, Compton, Keeler, & Angold, 2003; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olsen, 1997). Parenting style has also been shown to impact student performance, with lower social class parents often exhibiting behaviors that are detrimental to student achievement. These include the quality of interactions between parent and child (Chen, Matthews, & Boyce, 2002), the quality of the relationship expectations (Maccoby, 1980), and parental involvement in the school (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002). The school environment is the second category that contributes to lower social class achievement gaps. Evidence suggests that school segregation by social class contributes to achievement gaps (Hochschild, 2003; McLoyd; National Center for Education Statistics, 2008) as do school personnel through their explicit and implicit interactions with students (Bemak, 2005; Lee, 2005; Lott, 2001; Oates; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

The impact of social class on the achievement gap is well-documented. For example, Signer and Saldana (2001) studied 100 African American and White students from both high and low SES school communities and found that parental education and SES (both core variables

when objectively measuring social class) were found to be two of the strongest factors related to student achievement on test scores, grades, and persistence. Shin (2005) reported significant differences between the social classes when analyzing high school drop-out rates. He found that poor students, defined as those from families with income of less than \$20,000, had a 6.1 percent drop out rate compared to 4.0 for middle income students and 1.8 for upper class students. Finally, Trusty and Niles (2004) found a strong positive relationship between SES and bachelor's degree completion within eight years of high school graduation. This relationship was summarized by noting that a one standard deviation gain in socioeconomic status increased the likelihood of degree completion by 64% when all other variables were controlled. The context of the article focused on "lost talent" or students with the ability and aspirations to attain a bachelor's degree that did not do so. These studies are three of many that suggest that lower social class students struggle to perform well academically, complete high school, and matriculate to postsecondary education. The concept of "lost talent" seems to describe outcomes for many lower social class students whose academic achievement is not effectively supported during adolescence.

*Career Development:* The intersection of social class and career development has been given much empirical attention; but this attention has had little impact on contemporary career theories which are primarily based on the middle class norm (Chaves, et al., 2004). Most extant career theories extol the idea that work is meant to provide reward and meaning to the worker. Research has found that many from the lower social classes, particularly high school students, view work more as a means to make money and keep themselves busy than as a way to make meaning (Blustein, 2007; Blustein, et al., 2002; Chaves et al.). Additionally, high school students from lower social classes are less likely to translate their plans, even when similar to the plans of



their higher class peers, into career goal attainment (Rouse, 2004). Clear differences exist between the social classes when one examines their career development aspirations, behaviors, and outcomes. These differences are addressed below.

*Aspirations:* In her seminal work that introduced the Theory of Circumscription and Compromise, Gottfredson (1981) described an occupational aspiration as “the single occupation named as one’s best alternative at any given time.” (p.548). For the adolescent population, aspirations are in a state of flux due to normal developmental patterns as well as uncertainty that evolves as awareness of self and social class evolve. This growing awareness of one’s social class leads to the creation of a “zone of acceptable occupations” within which one’s occupational aspirations lie. This zone is heavily influenced by one’s social class of origin (Gottfredson, 2002).

Two studies that support Gottfredson’s theory while also exploring other common concurrent variables of class are shared here. Solorzano (1992) explored the effects of social class, among other variables, with Caucasian and African-American 8<sup>th</sup> grade students drawn from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey. Findings indicated that social class was positively related to both educational aspirations and occupational aspirations regardless of race. For example, 48.9% of low SES White males aspire to college while 94.9% of high SES White males aspire to college. In another study that focused on social class and gender, Mau, Domnick, and Ellsworth (1995) sampled 930 female eighth graders from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, comparing those who aspired to science and engineering occupations to those who aspired to homemaking occupations. They found that females who aspired to the technical occupations evidenced higher social class scores than those who aspired to homemaking.

*Behaviors:* The literature suggests that parental aspirations, expectations, and involvement have a dramatic impact on student aspirations and possibly behaviors. Recent findings that highlight this relationship are shared below. Hill et al. (2004) examined a longitudinal model of parental academic involvement, aspirations, and achievement. The authors concluded that lower social class parental involvement during the middle and high school years increased academic and occupational aspirations but not the child behaviors necessary for goal attainment. One reason for this result, which differed from that of higher social class parents, might be a lack of confidence and/or ability to assist students with their academic work. These findings are supported by previous research including that from Jordan and Plank (2000) and Trusty (1999). Both studies addressed the difficulty low income parents have in helping their children meet their educational aspirations. Not all families maintain high aspirations for the children. Charles, Roscigno, and Torres (2007) found that low familial aspirations and investment shape individual cultural behaviors that lend to the current race and class based achievement gaps in college attendance. These behaviors include saving money for college, actionable knowledge of student aid resources, parent involvement in child's education, discussing educational expectations, child participation in extracurricular activities, and investment in accumulating cultural capital (e.g. trips to museums).

*Outcomes:* One might naturally conclude that behavior and aspiration differences would lead to outcome differences; the data would support this conclusion. Owens (1992) examined data from the Youth in Transition survey of 2,213 boys in the United States to explore employment and educational outcomes of male high school graduates based on social class. The research suggested that the boys from lower social classes were more likely to enter the work or military forces out of high school, while those from higher social classes were more likely to

enter college. In terms of educational attainment, Berkner and Chavez (1997) concluded that “the proportion of all students who enroll in postsecondary education within two years of high school graduation was directly related to family income: 64 percent of low-income, 79 percent of middle-income, and 93 percent of high-income students.”

Despite these class-based trends, there is evidence that lower social class students can be successful not only in elementary and secondary school, but in pursuing postsecondary education as well. Considering college as the best opportunity for social class mobilization, Paulsen and St. John (2002) further identify contrasts between the social classes that highlight the impact of social class reproduction. While lower income students are less likely to attend college, they are more likely than their higher income peers to earn “A” grades upon their matriculation to higher education. Also supporting this thesis, Berkner and Chavez (1997, p. iii) found that “High school graduates whose parents have low levels of income and education are able to attend four-year colleges at the same rates as students from middle-income families, if they do what four-year colleges expect them to do” (i.e. take a college entrance exam and complete an application).” In fact, low income students who have been accepted to four-year public and private colleges are just as likely to enroll as other income level students. The rub is that low income students are not as well prepared as students from the higher income groups. Even those who are college qualified are much less likely to take entrance examinations and complete the application process required for acceptance to a four-year college (Berkner & Chavez). The evidence seems to suggest that while lower social class students are capable of achievement in both secondary and postsecondary school, they are not doing so as their middle and upper class peers.

*Subheading Summary:* A review of the literature suggests that social class generally is negatively correlated to student academic, personal/social, and career development. Therefore,

one might correctly surmise that students from poverty, lower social class, and/or working class backgrounds are less likely to thrive developmentally than their middle and higher class peers. Of these lower social class designations, poverty is a point of demarcation often used when making social and educational policy decisions in the United States (APA, 2007). The concept of poverty is often used to benchmark U.S. education against its international peers. For example, when compared to other industrialized nations, the United States has one of the highest rates of childhood poverty (22.4%; U.S. Census, 2005) in the world. Because of its salience, poverty was chosen as the primary independent variable for this study.

### *Poverty Covariates*

Due to the nature of the social hierarchy of power and privilege in United States society, poverty is often concurrent with other personal attributes representative of historically non-dominant or minority groups. The confluence of one's multiple identities within the structure of power and privilege is termed intersectionality. Three important tenets of this concept are: 1) social groups are not homogeneous, 2) people should be identified within the social structure in such a way that it describes their relationship to power within that structure, and 3) there are unique effects of identifying with more than one group and these effects are not additive in nature (Stewart & McDermott, 2004). The following subsections describe the relationship between poverty and three potential covariates identified in the literature as apropos for this study.

*Academic Preparation:* Family income is the single best predictor of academic achievement followed by parental occupation and education. When these three factors are combined, the correlation with achievement is only slightly higher than with income alone. The

correlation between income and achievement is most significant when applied to aggregate data versus individual level data (White, 1982).

There is substantial evidence that poverty and poor academic readiness, preparation, and performance are closely related. Impoverished learning environments often lack educational resources and qualified teachers which lead to poor academic preparation and achievement (Hochschild, 2003; McLoyd, 1998). Evidence suggests a reciprocal negative relationship between poor achievement and the reactions of school personnel through their explicit and implicit interactions with students (Bemak, 2005; Lee, 2005; Lott, 2001; Oates, 2003; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). The end result is that schools “systematically undereducate poor and working-class youth, and youth of color, but they taint pride with shame, convert a yearning for quality education into anger at its denial, and they channel active civic engagement into social cynicism and alienation.” (Fine, Burns, Payne, & Torre, 2004, p. 2193.)

In the arena of school counseling, Lee and Ekstrom (1987) found a similar reciprocal relationship in their exploration of equity in school guidance services. Disadvantaged students (those from lower SES, small rural schools, and minority populations) were less likely to receive counselor assistance for track and program planning and therefore less likely to be found in academic program tracks than their higher social class peers. This naturally progresses to the finding that disadvantaged students receive less college planning counseling than their higher social class peers because they were not in the academic, college preparatory track. Importantly, the authors concluded that guidance counseling had a significant and positive causal effect on placement in the academic track which leads one to conclude that counselors met more often with higher social class students than lower social class students. This suggests the concurrent

relationship between poverty and academic preparation as it may influence the school counseling relationship.

*Race/ethnicity:* Race/ethnicity and gender are the two most well documented demographic descriptors that are linked to poverty and lower socioeconomic status (APA, 2007). In the United States, African Americans, Latinos/as, and Native Americans are overrepresented in poor and lower social class populations while Whites are disproportionally represented amongst the middle and upper class segments of the population (Iceland, 2006; Lui et al., 2006). In schools, the link between race/ethnicity and social class is often framed in terms of the achievement gap between historically underrepresented groups and White students. This gap represents the schism between White and minority student academic achievement including measures of reading and math using standardized test scores, grade point averages, quality of courses taken, and matriculation to postsecondary education (Brown & Trusty, 2005).

No research was found pertaining to the intersection of race/ethnicity and social class in the school counseling milieu. Several publications examining the school counselor/student relationship in the context of racial/ethnic match do provide some context for the present study. Lee, Sutton, France, and Uhlemann (1983) examined the influence of counselor race on client-perceived attractiveness with 195 White high school students finding that they were significantly more attracted to White counselors than ethnic minority counselors. This study was limited by the fact that only White students were used as subjects and *real* counseling dyads were not used. The Sladen (1982) study described earlier in this chapter is another example of a study that found results and used methodology similar to Lee et al. Porche and Banikiotes (1982) on the other hand found results similar to those of Goldberg and Tidwell. In their study, 247 Black high school students were found to rate White school counselors more attractive than Black school

counselors. Like the Lee et al. study, the respondents in this one were responding to hypothetical scenarios instead of actual counseling situations and was limited by the use of only one participant population; Black high school students.

More recently, research by Maramba and Hall (2002) suggests that cultural match (described as shared language, understanding of client culture, and client willingness to receive treatment) supersedes ethnic match as a predictor of client outcomes. Gamst, Dana, Der-Karabetian, and Kramer (2004) verified the findings of Maramba and Hall using Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) score outcomes to determine that neither youth nor adolescent clients in community mental health centers realize better therapeutic outcomes when matched with a counselor with the same ethnicity. To echo the suggestion of this study's authors, the evidence suggests a need for a more comprehensive, inclusive, and systematic way of assessing cultural competence. The evidence pertaining to the influence of race/ethnicity on the counseling relationship is mixed warranting the inclusion of race/ethnicity as a covariate in any study of the school counseling dyad and cultural factors.

*Gender:* Like race/ethnicity, gender is closely linked to social class and has a long history of empirical study in counseling relationship research (APA, 2007). Women have been disproportionately poor when compared to men since entering the workforce en masse following World War Two and have consistently represented 57% of the poverty population since the middle 1970's (Iceland, 2006). Gender differences in school are often seen when analyzing achievement gaps specific to math and science courses and student career development (Brown & Trusty, 2005; Niles & Harris-Bowlsby, 2009).

No studies were found investigating gender and school counselor match. The following studies provide a foundation for conceptualizing gender match research. In a study specific to

school counseling, Goldberg and Tidwell (1990) used both ethnicity and gender as independent variables to explore the impact dyadic match along these two factors had on client perceived attractiveness and therapeutic outcomes with high school aged students. Using 116 high school students from five school districts, the authors created four levels of matched dyads with eight school counselors; two of whom were male/Black, male/White, female/Black, and female/White. The primary research hypotheses, that greater match would result in higher levels of attraction from client to counselor and more positive outcomes were not supported. The authors concluded that neither ethnic nor gender match acted as barriers to effective counseling in this case but that future research should explore these findings further as they counteract previous findings. One potential reason for these differences is that this study used *real* counseling interactions versus analogue-type studies.

Rabichow and Sklansky (1980) who used hypothetical sessions to find that counselees of both genders preferred a same-sex counselor, Highland and Russell (1980) who found that gender roles of masculine and feminine affected counselee ratings along gender lines, and Hardin and Yanico (1983) who found that females were attracted to female counselors more than males were. Due to the consistent findings in the literature regarding gender match, the authors provided a possible explanation for this inconsistency citing that their intervention was highly structured and focused on course selection. They hypothesized that the high likelihood that this type of interaction turns out positive for the client may have influenced their perception of the counselors attractiveness more so than gender (Goldberg & Tidwell, 1990).

In this section, a summary of research has been presented that suggests that academic achievement, gender, and race/ethnicity are important covariates in this study of the influence of poverty on school counselor reactions. Brown and Trusty (2005) echoed this sentiment while



summarizing research findings in their school counseling text by stating that “gender, early achievement, SES, and race/ethnicity make a difference in an outcome such as choice of postsecondary major” (p. 49) and that these factors work in concert to make a dynamic difference in educational development.

### *Limitations of the Existing Research*

There are several factors that contribute to the limitations of research pertaining to understanding the impact of student poverty on the school counselor reaction to student clients. Once identified, researchers should remain undeterred by limitations as any evidence found is helpful in explaining phenomena and future research using the newfound evidence may resolve the limitations to the current study (Gelso, 1979). The inconsistency in conceptualizing and reporting social class phenomena in the counseling literature makes any conclusions drawn from extant literature tenuous at best. Furthermore, the preponderance of literature pertaining to social class is either theoretical in nature or simply discusses the construct without including it as a research variable (Liu, Ali, et al., 2004). The foundation upon which the study of social class is built is not yet established at this time.

A second layer of limitations can be found resulting from the nature of the relationship being studied. The ethical considerations of confidentiality, working alliance, liability, and the determination to do no harm make experimental manipulation of the therapeutic relationship a dangerous endeavor. The generalizability of findings is limited due to the difficulty in recruiting participants from representative samples and accessing data derived from actual counseling sessions due to ethical limits. While analogue designs are an oft-used method of investigating such sensitive relationships, the limitations remain.

Finally, the instrumentation designed for measuring counselor reaction to clients is extremely limited. The few that do exist have not been used often and lack strong indicators of validity and reliability. The Counselor Reaction Form, which will be employed in this study, and its subscales have been used in only three studies to date with limited populations and samples. While the CRF was originally designed for analogue studies, it has not been a tool used for the study of poverty/social class or with school counselors, school-aged clients, or in school settings.

### *Summary of Findings*

The review of literature suggests the need for further study of student-client poverty status on school counselor reactions to the client that may influence counselor behaviors and the counseling relationship. There is a clear imperative on the part of school counselors to work with all students towards their personal/social, academic, and career development (ASCA, 2005). In fact, school counselors may be in the best position within the school system to provide assistance to those students living in poverty (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Lee, 2005; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). Thus far, there is limited evidence that school counselors may exhibit bias towards student-clients (Sladen, 1982) or be a bad match because of their cultural differences (Goldberg & Tidwell, 1990).

The existing evidence that does pertain to this line of inquiry is fragmented and most often not focused on poverty or social class as a variable of study (Liu, Ali, et al., 2004). The key themes gleaned from this literature as they pertain to the study at hand are:

1. Poverty, a common line of social class demarcation when looking at aggregate school outcome data (APA, 2007), has some utility as a variable for understanding the counseling dynamic from a cross-cultural perspective.

2. Despite their limitations, analogue studies are commonly used to investigate the influence of cross-cultural variables on the counseling relationship in an ethical manner.
3. The nature of analogue designs oftentimes limits the measures available for the study of counselor reactions to clients; in this case client disturbance and attractiveness.
4. Academic preparation, race/ethnicity, and gender are important covariates of poverty that warrant inclusion in this study.

## Chapter 3

### Method

Chapter three presents the method for exploring the research questions posed in this study. Included are a description of the study design, research participants, method of recruiting participants, description of the stimulus material, data collection procedures, research questions, measures of the dependent variables, measures of the independent variables/covariates, and limitations to the study.

#### *Study Design*

My study utilized a live analog research design. Analog research designs are used to simulate aspects of the counselor, client, and/or counseling process so that experimental control can be effectively and ethically imposed. Social influence research in counseling, including the study of counselor/ client traits such as expertness, attractiveness, and trustworthiness, has been a major focus of analog designs. Analog designs give the researcher the benefit of experimental control and independent variable manipulation but suffer from key limitations to generalizability or external validity (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999).

The statistical strategy was correlational. Correlational strategies are commonly used in counseling process research to study the link between process characteristics and outcomes (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999). In this case, correlations were explored between the independent (poverty status and academic preparation) and dependent (counselor attractiveness to working with client and assessment of disturbance) variables. This statistical strategy is limited in that causal relationships cannot be determined.

Both the live analog design and correlational strategy were chosen for this study after considering several factors. First, poverty is a variable of social influence that has yet to be

thoroughly examined in the context of the counseling relationship. Second, the dearth of research evidence pertaining to the impact of poverty on relationships suggests the need for experimental control over extraneous variables to ensure the focus of the study is accurately realized. Third, the existing literature does suggest that poverty status may impact the counseling relationship and process. Finally, the client population (minors) and sensitivity of the context (counseling) ethically necessitates a simulated situation to protect the well-being of the clients.

This study used a hypothetical case scenario (Appendix A) to provide a neutral situational context to participants before stimulus materials were introduced to manipulate the independent variables. All participants were presented with the same, short hypothetical case scenario. The scenario presented a student with a gender neutral name and issues common to those entering a new school. The hypothetical case scenario is a method that has been previously used to study sensitive school counseling research constructs such as bullying (Carney, 2008; Carney, 2000), race/ethnicity matching (Lee et al., 1983; Porche & Banikiotes, 1982), and gender matching (Highlen & Russell, 1980; Rabichow & Sklansky, 1980).

Two documents were used as stimulus materials for this study. Both are considered common components of a student's record file upon or shortly after entry into a new school district. The first document, titled "New Student Registration Form," was used to manipulate the independent variable poor/non-poor. Included in this document were several indicators of the student's poverty status including parental education, parental occupation, student address (home versus apartment), and whether the student is eligible for free/reduced school lunch. There were two versions of this form; one version presented the student's family as poor (Appendix B), while the second presented the student's family as being middle to upper middle class (Appendix C). The second stimulus, titled "Student Transcript from Previous Institution," was used to

manipulate the independent variable student academic achievement. This document offered two levels of student academic achievement through the reporting of grades and the level of classes taken. One transcript reported modest academic achievement by reporting a “C+” grade average and coursework that was not advanced (Appendix D). The second transcript reported a high level of academic achievement through an “A” grade average and advanced coursework (Appendix E).

Four cells were created by the two levels of each independent variable (poor/modest academic achievement, poor/ high academic achievement, non-poor/ modest academic achievement, non-poor/ high academic achievement). Each individual cell was programmed as a block in the Qualtrics on-line software ([www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)) so that the randomization function could be employed. The randomization function activates after a designated prompt, in this case the presentation of the case scenario, to randomize the next question or block of questions in the survey logic tree. This function ensured equal distribution of participants to the four cells. The final participant sample was not equally distributed across the four cells because of in vivo participant drop-out.

### *Participants*

Participants in the study were practicing secondary school counselors. Secondary school counselors were defined as those working with any combination of students in grades 6-12. Potential participants were invited via an electronic newsletter and professional organization listservs and message boards using an Institutional Review Board approved invitation (Appendix F). Screening questions were used to ensure that each participant worked as a full-time school counselor in a secondary school environment. Respondents to the survey invitation were

assigned to one of four cells based on the pre-determined randomization protocol described in the section above.

Participants were recruited through several online networking groups including the ASCA membership via the monthly electronic newsletter called *ASCA Aspects* and the on-line discussion board called *ASCA Scene*, the Missouri School Counselor Association list-serv, the Pennsylvania School Counselor Association message board, and the Tennessee School Counselor Association message board. These modes of inviting participants were garnered through professional contacts in those organizations and therefore should be considered a form of convenience sampling. Potential participants were also invited to pass the survey invitation on to their qualified colleagues. Participation was voluntary and no form of reimbursement was offered in exchange for completing the study. Participants were given the opportunity to request study results.

Study participants (N = 173) were primarily female (86.7%) and Caucasian (88.4%) but provided some racial/ethnic diversity including Latino/a (4.0%), African American (3.5%), Asian (1.7%), and Bi/multiracial (2.3%) participants. With respect to professional experience, 22.0 % reported 2 or less years, 27.2% 3-5 years, 24.3% 6-10 years, and 25.4% having 11 or more years experience working as a school counselor with 1.2% not reported their years of experience. The social class background as measured by the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status was reported as 1.7% from the lowest class, 9.2% from lower middle class, 23.7% from middle class, 41.0% from upper middle class, and 24.3% from upper class family backgrounds. Please refer to Appendix K for a further summary of the participant demographics.

The schools in which the participants worked varied in size and social class standing. In terms of size, 22.5% worked in schools with less than 500 students, 34.7% between 501-1000,

15.0% between 1001 and 1500, and 24.9% with more than 1500 with 2.9% not reported their school's size. The perceived social class standing of the schools in which they worked was scored using a 10-point scale where 1 = the schools in the United States with the most money and resources and 10 = the schools with the fewest resources. The participants reported that 19.7% rated their school as 1 or 2, 38.2% as a 3 or 4, 24.9% as a 5 or 6, 14.5% as a 7 or 8, and 2.9 percent rated their school as a 9 or 10. While the sample was predominantly comprised of Caucasian female school counselors, there was great diversity in professional experience, social class background, school size, and the social class of the schools in which they worked.

### *Instruments*

Participants were asked to respond to two measures of dependent variables: the Client Disturbance and Attractiveness Subscales (Tryon, 1993) of the Counselor Reaction Form (Appendix G; Howell & Highlen, 1981). Following the completion of the two instruments used to measure dependent variables, two questions were posed as a test of the manipulation of the independent variables (Appendix H). Each participant was then asked to complete forms to measure potential covariates including a personal demographic questionnaire (Appendix I), and a school demographic questionnaire (Appendix J).

*Measures of Dependent Variables* - The Counselor Reaction Form (CRF) is an instrument developed by Howell and Highlen (1981) to measure a counselor's clinical impressions of and attractiveness to working with a client as well as an assessment of their own performance. The CRF was created by combining items used in several analogue studies (Bishop & Richards, 1984, 1987; Hill, Tanney, Leonard, & Reiss, 1977; Lee, Hallberg, Hassard, and Haase, 1979; Sharf & Bishop, 1979) into the eleven 7-point items known as the CRF (Tryon, 1993). Howell and Highlen used the form in an analogue study with sixty counselor participants.



They determined the interrelationship among the eleven items using the principal factor solution and estimating the commonalities along the diagonal of the correlation matrix. Using the varimax rotation method, they found four factors with loadings of .5 or higher. These factors were labeled counselor perceptions, client change, need for help, and assessment of self (Howell & Highlen).

Tryon (1993) identified the CRF as a potential tool for researching counseling dropout because of its brevity and ease of use. Given that Howell and Highlen (1981) were the only authors to attempt to group CRF items (using factor analysis), Tryon completed principle components analysis to identify CRF scales for both experienced counselors and trainees. The professional participants were five Ph.D. level psychologists, four whom identified as clinicians and one who identified as a counselor. The participants saw 80 clients who were rated as part of the study. The analysis resulted in the creation of two subscales that are described below. These subscales have been used at least once to study counselor ratings and client dropout in a college counseling center (Tryon, 1999) and were found to be significantly related when subjected to a Pearson product-moment correlation,  $r(255) = .19, p < .01$ .

The Client Disturbance Scale is comprised of four items that measure the counselor's perception of the seriousness of the client's problem (7-point scale), how well adjusted the client is (7-point scale), how much the client will profit from counseling (7-point scale), and how many sessions the client will need (5 categorical options). Higher numbers indicate more of the characteristic for the three 7-point scale items with the "how well adjusted the client is" item being reversed scored. The anchors for each scale relate to the individual item with 1 designated as *not at all* and 7 *extremely* with the exception of the reversed adjustment scale which ranges from 1 designated as *extremely well adjusted* and 7 *not at all adjusted*. The categorical item has five answer options including 0, 1-2, 3-5, 6-10, and 11 or more sessions (Tryon, 1993). The CRF

measures of clinical impressions of the client were adapted items that were used in analogue studies conducted by Hill, Tanney, Leonard, and Reiss (1977) and Lee, Hallberg, Hassard, and Haase (1979). Counselor assessed client disturbance has been positively correlated with client's engagement in continued counseling (Tryon, 1999) and counselor's assessment that the client needs continued counseling (Bishop & Sharf, 1981). Tryon (1993) found coefficient alphas of .87 for practicum trainees and .86 for psychologists with this subscale. The coefficient alpha for the Client Disturbance Scale in this study was .62. While George and Mallery (2003) would label this alpha level as *questionable*, one should consider the relatively low number of items in this particular construct when interpreting this measure of internal consistency.

The Attractiveness Scale contains three 7 point scale items that measure the counselor's perception of the client's motivation to change, attractiveness as a person, and the counselor's desire to work with the client. For these scales, higher numbers represent a larger representation of the characteristic with the anchors for each scale relate to the individual item with 1 designated as *not at all* and 7 *extremely* (Tryon, 1993). Counselor assessed client attractiveness is also described as motivated or likable and has been positively correlated with increased engagement in counseling as evidenced by return appointments after the first session (Tryon, 1999) and counselor preference in seeing clients for multiple sessions (Tryon & DeVito, 1980).

The CRF measures of attraction are modified forms of two items developed by Byrne (1961) as part of the Interpersonal Judgment Scale. The items are (a) "How much do you like this client as a person?" and (b) "if this person were your client, how much would you like to work with him or her?" The item scores are summed to produce an index of attraction. This index has been used in hundreds of studies (Byrne, 2005) and has been found to have a split-half reliability of .85 (Byrne & Griffitt, 1973). This measure has been found to have a strong

relationship with others attraction measures including social distance scales, ratings as desirability as a date, eye contact, and a number of verbal and non-verbal scales (Byrne & Griffitt). The third item included in the attraction subscale was initially part of the clinical impressions of the client portion of the CRF (Howell & Highlen, 1981). Principle components analysis of the CRF (Tryon, 1993) identified this item as a stronger fit in the attractiveness subscale for which coefficient alphas of .80 for trainees and .79 for psychologists were found. The coefficient alpha for the Client Attraction Scale in this study was .59. Once again George and Mallery (2003) would label this alpha level as *poor* but one should that this construct has even fewer items, three, than the disturbance scale. Furthermore, despite the low internal consistency significant findings were

found for this variable for both independent variables suggesting sufficient internal consistency.

A limitation of these subscales is that they were developed in a training environment using a small sample size (n=5 doctoral level clinical and counseling psychologists; n=7 counseling practicum trainees; n=257 college students). While there are some similarities between the training of doctoral level psychologists and experienced school counselors, the fact that this scale was developed with a different population is a limitation. Furthermore, the CRF and the two subscales have been used very little in any empirical studies. An extensive literature review found only the three studies noted above where the instrument was used. Regardless of these limitations, these subscales were the only appropriate measure identified for the purposes of this study.

*Measures of Independent Variables/Covariates*

*Manipulation Checks of the Independent Variables:* Manipulation checks are used to ensure that treatments are implemented in the fashion intended by the study design. Three types of checks described by Heppner, Kivlighan, and Wampold (1999) were incorporated in this study. First, the stimulus materials were reviewed by independent raters for ecological validity. These raters included two practicing school counselors with 16 and 22 years of experience and two school counselor educators who have previous experience as school counselors. The two counselor educators currently coordinate school counseling internship programs that necessitate their on-going interaction with multiple counselors and school sites.

Next, a beta version of the on-line survey was taken by three practicing secondary school counselors and seven secondary school counseling students (n=10) to test the manipulation of the independent variables. Test participants took the survey and then were asked two four-point Likert-type questions to test the variable manipulation. Successful manipulation was judged to occur when the respondent selected either the probably or definitely anchored response towards the matched end of the four point scale. For example, successful manipulation occurred when the respondent answered definitely poor and probably high academic achievement when assigned a case where the manipulation was intended to be that of a poor, high academic achieving student. In all ten cases, the respondent correctly identified the case study student assigned to them on both the poverty and academic achievement level meeting the criteria for successful manipulation outlined above.

Finally, the same inquiry of the study participants was used to check the independent variables poverty status and academic achievement to ensure that the participants perceived manipulated constructs in the way intended by the research design. Upon completion of the measures, participants were asked to rate their client's poverty status and academic achievement.

Because the study is designed to manipulate two dichotomous variables, participants were asked two four-point Likert-type questions to test the variable manipulation. The first assessed their perception of student poverty by asking, “How would you describe the student client’s social class background?” and the second asked “How would you describe the student client’s academic background?” (Appendix H).

Participant responses to the manipulation check questions were compared to the research cell group to which they were assigned to ensure that the independent variable manipulation effect was achieved. Participants who were randomly assigned to a poor category cell rated the student as either probably or definitely poor 85.4% of the time. Conversely, participants assigned to a non-poor cell rated their student as probably or definitely not poor 97.6% of the time. In analyzing the manipulation of the academic achievement variable one finds that participants assigned to the modestly prepared cell responded either probably or definitely modestly prepared 76.7% of the time. Finally, 94.3% of participants assigned to a high academic achievement cell responded with probably or definitely accomplished.

*Participant Demographic Questionnaire* – The author developed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix I) to collect the following information on participants: age, gender, race/ethnicity, education level, experience as a school counselor, parents’ education, and parents’ occupation.

*Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status* – Education and occupational information collected from the demographic questionnaire was used to determine the participant’s social class of origin. The Hollingshead Two and Four Factor Index of Social Status are currently among the most commonly used measures of social class in counseling research (Liu, Ali, et al., 2004). The Hollingshead four factor index uses education, occupation,

sex, and marital status to measure one's social status structure in society (Hollingshead, 1975).

The measure has been used in health research, sociological research, and counseling psychology research to group subjects into social class categories (Oakes and Rossi, 2003).

In my study, data were collected specifically for two scales. To determine their social class of origin, the participants were asked to record their parent/caregiver occupation and education levels from when they (the participant) were 14 years of age. Participants were given the option of recording data for one or two parents or caregivers. These data were captured as string text data and then scored by the principal investigator according to the criteria outlined by Hollingshead (1975). The nine-point occupational scale ranks occupations by their prestige and monetary remuneration and businesses by their size and monetary value. Parental occupations were given one of nine scores (1-9) that best represents the occupations listed. Despite criticism that the index is outdated (Hollingshead, 1975; Oakes & Rossi, 2003), all occupations identified in the survey were matched to an occupation listed in the index. One explanation for this might be that the version of the index used for this study included several levels of computer and technical occupations that the two factor version did not (Hollingshead & Redlich, 1958). The seven point education scale is also divided into seven scores representing various levels of educational attainment. Parental education levels were given one of seven scores (1-7) that matched the data recorded in the survey.

Scores from the two scales are weighted, the occupational score by a factor of five and the educational score by a factor of three. The sum of these two weighted scores provides the overall social position score for a family with one working parent or caregiver. For households with data reported for two working adults, the two weighted scores were added and then divided by two to create the position score. This index score was then used to identify the social class in

which the respondent fits. The score ranges used by Hollingshead are in the table below.

Common class designations have been attributed to each for ease of use.

Class 1 (Lowest Class):	8-19	Class 4 (Upper Middle Class):	40-54
Class 2 (Lower Middle Class):	20-29	Class 5 (Upper Class):	55-66
Class 3 (Middle Class):	30-39		

In developing the original two factor index of social status, Hollingshead and Redlich (1958) reported a correlation between judged class and the education and occupation scales ( $R=.975$ ). Hollingshead reported a similar correlation ( $R=.927$ ) between the four factor index and the national Opinion Research Center General Social Survey prestige scores which were based on the 1970 census. In summary, the Hollingshead index has been “validated by longitudinal measurement models that show the Hollingshead index to be as strong an indicator of occupational status as is Treiman’s International Prestige Scale, the Hodge-Siegal Index, or the Duncan Socio-Economic Index.” (Miller, 2003, p.352). The coefficient alpha for the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status in this study was .77.

Due to the time period in which this measure was developed, there are several limitations of which a researcher should be aware. The limitations of this instrument stem from the fact that it was developed and normed in the 1950s before being updated in the 1970s. Researchers today are often forced to modify the instrument to include current occupation titles although this was not necessary in this study. The instrument does not include other indices of social position (capital) such as position in the community, extended family’s social position, or proximity to resources. Despite these limitations, this is the most common measure of social class used in counseling research. For the purposes of this study, the participant will be asked to identify

occupations in open-ended questions and education in a drop-down menu. These data will be used to calculate class designations using the Hollingshead Four-Factor Index of Social Position.

*School Demographic Questionnaire* – The author developed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix J) to collect the following information on the schools where participants are employed: grade level in school where counselor primarily works, percent of students who qualify for free/reduced school lunch, and participant’s perception of school’s social class standing.

*10-rung ladder* – A 10-rung ladder technique was used to measure the participant’s perception of their school’s social class standing (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000; Liu, 2002; Singh-Manoux, Adler, & Marmot, 2003). The technique assesses the client’s subjective worldview on their school’s social class. Several researchers have used a 10-rung ladder representing where people stand in society to assess their view of social class (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000; Liu, 2002; Singh-Manoux, Adler, & Marmot, 2003). Results from the use of this self-anchored scale “reflect the cognitive averaging of standard markers of socioeconomic situation and is free of psychological biases” (Singh-Manoux et al., 2003, p.1321). Liu, Soleck, et al. (2004) used the same ladder technique with a homogeneous group of college students and found the results to be normally distributed. To use this method, the respondent is given an image of a 10-rung ladder with instructions like the following:

Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in society. At the top of the ladder are the people who are best off – those who have the most money, most education, and best jobs. At the bottom are the people who are worst off – who have the least money, least education, and the worst jobs or no job. The higher up you are on this ladder, the closer you are to people at the very top and the lower you are, the closer you



are to the bottom. Where would you put yourself on the ladder? Please place a large “X” on the rung where you think you stand. (Adler et al., 2000, p. 587)

Adler et al. (2000) included both objective and subjective measures of social class in this study of women’s physiological and psychological functioning. In a comparison of subjective versus individual objective measures of SES, the subjective measure was significantly related to both income ( $r = .22, p < .01$ ) and education ( $r = .32, p < .01$ ) but not occupational category ( $r = .11$ ). When compared to a composite measure of the three objective measures, the subjective measure had the strongest relationship ( $r = .40, p < .01$ ). The two types of measurement were then compared to both the physiological and psychological variables used in the study. Of note, more psychological (as well as physiological) variables were related to the subjective versus the objective measure including measures of stress, pessimism, control, and coping. In conclusion the authors found that a simple one-item subjective measure of SES was strongly linked to psychological factors. Qualitative methods such as the ladder technique are viewed by many to be the most effective way of exploring subjective phenomena in this milieu (Granfield, 1990; Liu, Soleck, et al., 2004).

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

Email invitations were sent via one electronic newsletter, three message board postings, and one mass email to a list-serv. The invitations contained a link to the survey website as well as a request that invitees pass it on to their colleagues (Appendix F). Participants were prompted with a Human Subjects Internal Review Board approved consent form as the opening page to the web survey. After giving consent, participants were presented a brief explanation of the study including an introduction to the case study method. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four case conditions: poor/modest academic achievement, poor/high academic achievement,

non-poor/ modest academic achievement, or non-poor/ high academic achievement. After reading the case introduction, participants were prompted with the student registration form and student transcript that matched their case condition with the instruction to thoroughly review the materials before proceeding. Participants were notified that they may view the three stimulus documents while filling out two measures of the dependent variables by the corresponding document link provided at the bottom of each survey page.

### *Research Question*

The dependent variables for the study were (a) counselor assessment of client disturbance, and (b) counselor assessment of attractiveness to working with the client. The independent variables were (a) student poverty status defined as either poor or non-poor and (b) student academic preparation to be defined as either modest academic preparation or accomplished academic preparation. Covariates analyzed for inclusion in this study were (a) participant race/ethnicity, (b) participant gender, (c) participant social class background, and (d) participant perception of school social class standing. The research question for the study was:

Are there differences and/or interaction effects in counselor perceptions of student client disturbance and/or counselor desire to work with student clients based upon student poverty status and educational preparation when controlling for counselor race/ethnicity, counselor gender, counselor social class background, and counselor perception of their school's social class?

### *Limitations*

The limitations of the study are offered below:

1. The analog design of the study curtails external validity and, therefore, limits generalizability.

2. The use of correlational statistical procedures will allow relationships to be suggested but not causality.
3. The sample for the study will be one of convenience which may result in a lack of representativeness along the variable included in the study (e.g. fewer teachers who have worked with significant number of students living in poverty than in the actual population).
4. Little research exists regarding the influence of social class or poverty on the counselor/client relationship. This limits the ability to ensure that study variables and covariates are reflective of all significant variables that influence this relationship.

## Chapter 4

### Results

Chapter four presents the analysis of data collected via the online experiment. Included in this chapter are a description of the study participants, preliminary analysis, and the MANCOVA analysis pertaining to the research question. The results presented in this chapter are in response to the following research question:

Are there differences and/or interaction effects in counselor perceptions of student client disturbance and/or counselor desire to work with student clients based upon student poverty status and educational preparation when controlling for counselor race/ethnicity, counselor gender, counselor social class background, and counselor perception of their school's social class?

#### *Preliminary Analysis*

Survey data were downloaded from the [www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com) website. A total of 229 individuals accessed the survey in response to the electronic invitations. There were a number of respondents who did not meet the inclusion criteria imposed on this study and were therefore not included in the data analysis. To qualify for inclusion respondents had to work full-time as a school counselor, work in a school setting serving any combination of grades 6-12, and respond to the forced answer questions designed to measure the dependent variables for this study.

In response to inclusion question one, three respondents aborted the survey and 12 responded "No" to the inquiry, "Are you currently working as a full-time school counselor?" thus excluding 15 respondents from the study. Of the 214 remaining respondents, one aborted the survey at inclusion question number two "Do you work in a school setting serving any

combination of the grades 6-12?” while 11 responded “No” thus excluding 12 additional respondents from the study. In summary, 229 people responded to the study invitation. Twenty-seven of these initial respondents were excluded from participation based upon their response to the inclusion criteria questions. The inclusion screening questions resulted in 202 total participants meeting the criteria to enter the study.

Data for the 202 participants in the study were visually inspected to identify participants who terminated the study before answering the items designed to collect the data required to calculate the dependent variables. This inspection identified 29 additional participants who were excluded from the data set used for analysis. A data set including the 173 cases identified via the methods discussed above were then examined for normality using skewness and kurtosis values as well as box and whisker plots generated using the Explore function of the SPSS program.

*Data transformation.* The distributions of the dependent variables were examined for normality. The variable client disturbance was significantly negatively skewed therefore a second power non-linear transformation was applied to the data (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The client attraction dependent variable did not require transformation after examining the distribution and assumptions of multivariate analysis. After transforming the data, the variable client disturbance became slightly positively skewed but within acceptable skewness value ranges for each cell.

*Replacement of missing data.* The dependent variable questions were programmed as forced answer questions using the Qualtrics software system, therefore all missing data were from the demographic questions. There were eight missing data points in the final data set; well below the 5% threshold identified as *less serious* by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001, p.59) which lends itself to most common procedures for computing missing values (Tabachnick & Fidell).

Missing ordinal data were imputed using the median substitution method. These data included responses used to calculate each participant's social class of origin (i.e. parent occupation and education levels used to determine Hollingshead four factor score) and perception of school social standing in society using the ten-point ladder of social position. In this method, the median is calculated from the available data for each variable with missing data and then used to replace each missing data point for that variable. Missing nominal data, including participant race and gender, were transformed using the mode substitution method where the mode is calculated from the available data for each variable with missing data and then used to replace each missing data point for that variable. After transformation, assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, linearity, and multicollinearity were supported.

#### *Bivariate Analysis*

Bivariate relationships were analyzed to identify potential extraneous variables present in this study. A review of the literature suggested that participant gender, race/ethnicity, social class background, and the social class of their work environment may have correlated with the dependent variables. Significant correlations of  $\pm .15$  or greater were identified and included as covariates in the primary analysis. Table 1 presents the correlation matrix. The covariates identified were gender ( $r = -.256$  with the dependent variable attraction) and race ( $r = -.186$  for Caucasian and  $r = .199$  for African American participants with the dependent variable disturbance). Although significant correlations were not found for the race/ethnicity categories Asian American, Latino(a), and Bi/multiracial, these were included in the primary analysis with Caucasian and African American participants.

### *Primary Analysis*

A 2 x 2 between-subjects multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was performed on the two dependent variables, client disturbance and attraction, associated with the independent variables student poverty status and level of academic achievement. Two of the four potential covariates, participant gender and race/ethnicity, were judged to be adequately reliable for inclusion in the covariance analysis. The inclusion of these two covariates was supported by both the literature and the bivariate analysis discussed in the previous subsection of this chapter. The multivariate results of the inclusion of gender  $F(2, 163) = 6.109, p = .003$  with a partial  $\eta^2 = .070$  were significant as were three of the four dummy coded race categories. Caucasian  $F(2, 163) = 4.923, p = .008$  with a partial  $\eta^2 = .057$ , Latino  $F(2, 163) = 3.388, p = .036$  with a partial  $\eta^2 = .040$ , and Asian  $F(2, 163) = 3.696, p = .027$  with a partial  $\eta^2 = .043$  were all significant while the inclusion of African American  $F(2, 163) = .654, p = .521$  with a partial  $\eta^2 = .008$  was not significant.

The results of the multivariate tests showed no statistically significant interaction between student poverty and student academic achievement on combined measures of student disturbance and attractiveness  $F(2, 163) = .800, p = .451$ . Significant main effects were found for the independent variable of poverty status,  $F(2, 163) = 4.495, p = .013$  with a partial  $\eta^2 = .052$ , and academic achievement,  $F(2, 163) = 4.872, p = .009$  with a partial  $\eta^2 = .056$ . Whereas the variables student poverty status and academic achievement are independent of one another, student poverty status explains 5.2% of the variability of the scores across both dependent variables while student academic achievement explains 5.6% of the variability.

Univariate analyses of variance were conducted for each dependent variable using alpha = .05. Results are presented in Table 2. The dependent variable student disturbance showed no

significant differences for the independent variable student poverty status  $F(1, 164) = .451, p = .503$  or the level of academic achievement  $F(1, 164) = 1.332, p = .250$ . Significant differences were found for the dependent variable attraction for both student poverty status  $F(1, 164) = 9.044, p = .003$  with a partial  $\eta^2 = .052$  and academic achievement  $F(1, 164) = .6.677, p = .011$  with a partial  $\eta^2 = .039$ . The variability of participant ratings of student attraction were explained by both student poverty status (5.2% of variability explained) and academic achievement (3.9% of variability explained). In summary, poor students were rated as more attractive clients than non-poor students while higher achieving students were rated as more attractive clients when compared to modest achieving students.

Table 3 presents mean scores and standard deviations that have been adjusted for the inclusion of the covariates gender and race. The attraction variable was significant for both student poverty status and academic achievement. These results are presented graphically in Figures 1 and 2.



Table 1

*Correlations between demographic variables and scales of interest*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Client Disturbance	--	.212**	-.045	-.186*	.199**	-.076	.016	-.058	.088
2. Client Attractiveness		--	-.256**	-.029	.081	-.068	.068	-.075	-.055
3. Gender			--	-.125	-.074	-.052	.179*	-.047	.095
4. Caucasian				--	-.524**	-.367**	-.568**	.100	-.057
5. African American					--	-.025	-.039	-.117	.062
6. Asian						--	-.027	.122	-.085
7. Latino							--	-.072	.081
8. Social Status								--	-.211**
9. School Status									--

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2

*Univariate MANCOVA Results*

Dependent	Group	df	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta$
Client Disturbance	Poor/ Non-poor	1	.451	.503	.003
	Modest/High Academic Achievement	1	1.332	.250	.008
Client Attractiveness	Poor/ Non-poor	1	9.044	.003	.052
	Modest/High Academic Achievement	1	6.677	.011	.039

Table 3

*Adjusted Client Disturbance and Attractiveness Means by Cell Assignment*

	Estimated	Std Error	n
	Marginal		
	Means		
<i>Client disturbance</i>			
Poor	17.248	2.948	89
Non-poor	17.001	2.992	84
High Achievement	16.913	2.963	87
Moderate Achievement	17.335	2.970	86
<i>Client attractiveness</i>			
Poor	16.001	0.231	89
Non-poor	14.996	0.237	84
High Achievement	15.928	0.233	87
Moderate Achievement	15.069	0.234	86

\* Means were adjusted for covariates, namely gender and race.

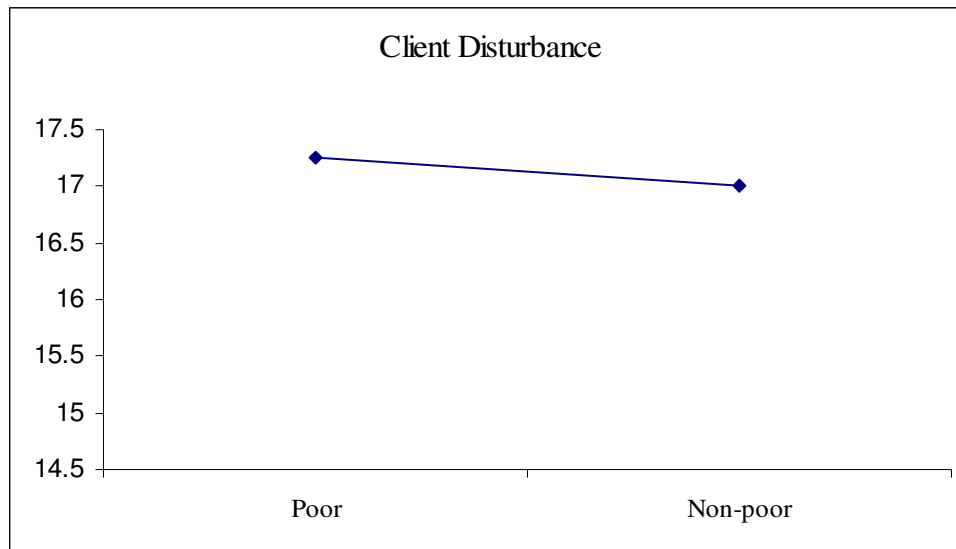


Figure 1. Adjusted Mean Disturbance Scores According to Poverty Group Assignment

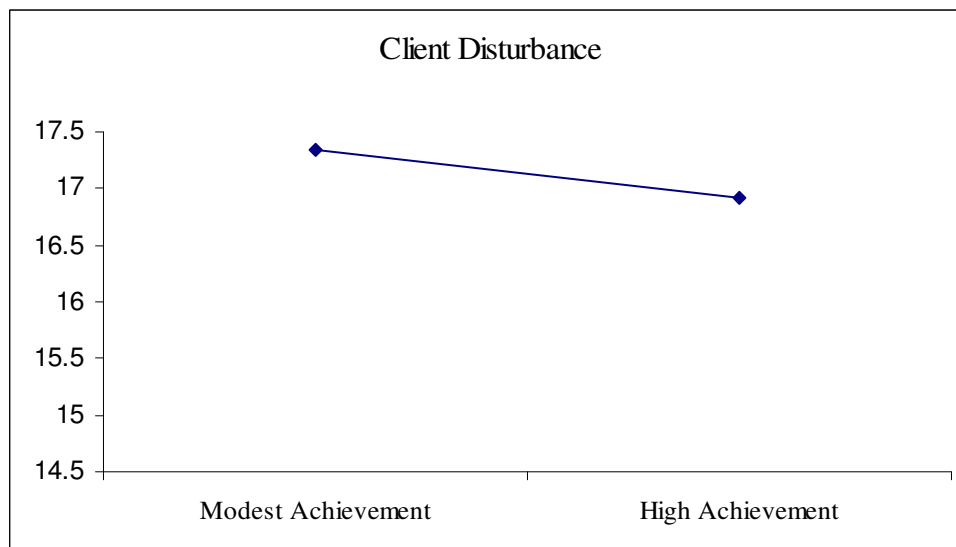


Figure 2. Adjusted Mean Disturbance Scores According to Academic Achievement Group Assignment

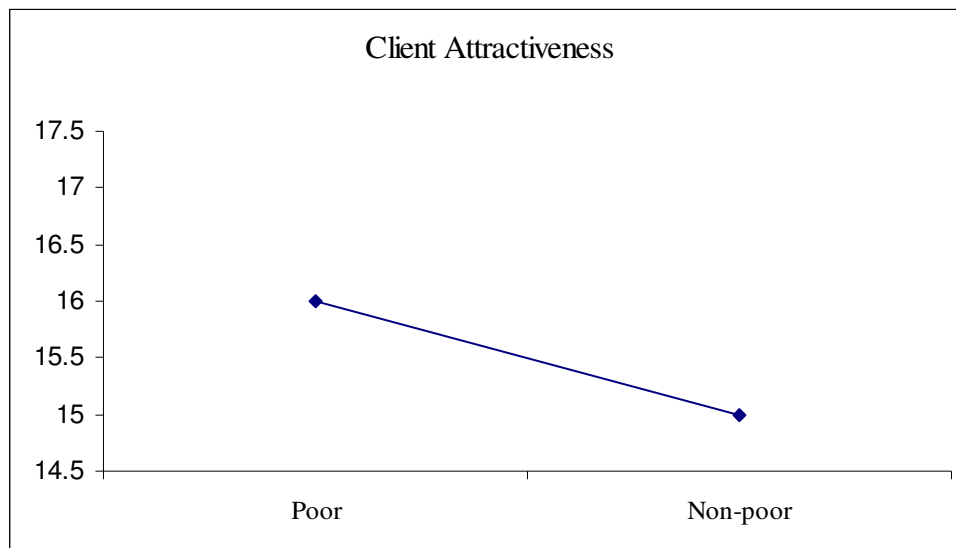


Figure 3. Adjusted Mean Attraction Scores According to Poverty Group Assignment

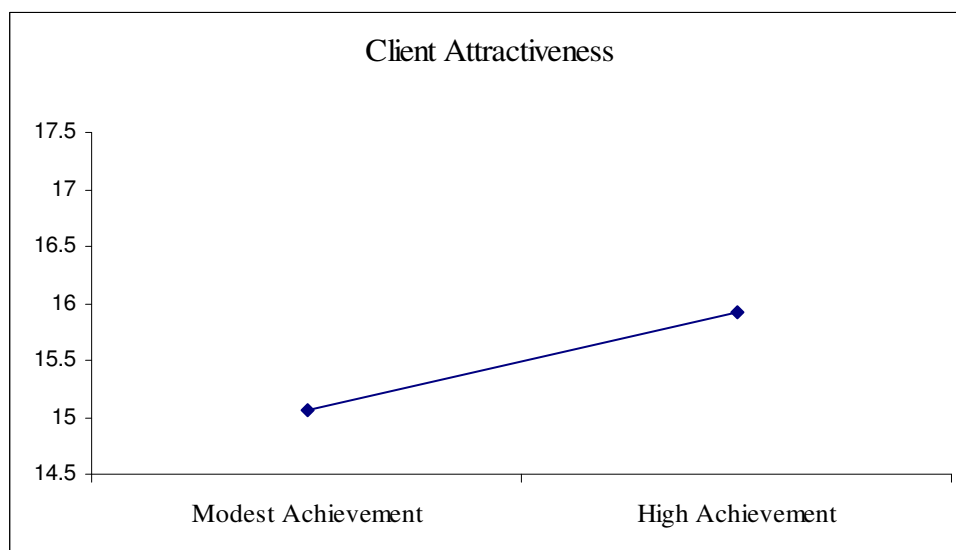


Figure 4. Adjusted Mean Attraction Scores According to Academic Achievement Group Assignment

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

Chapter five discusses a summary of the study and results presented in Chapters 3 and 4, study limitations, study strengths, and implications and suggestions for future research. The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between perceived student poverty and academic achievement status and how school counselors rated students on disturbance and attractiveness measures; two key indicators of the quality of a counseling relationship.

#### *Study Summary*

Data from 173 participants were gathered from several on-line networks including the American School Counselor Association and several state-level school counselor organizations. Two independent variables, student poverty status and academic achievement, were manipulated as part of the study design using forms that school counselors often see in student files. The two dependent variables in this study were client disturbance and client attractiveness. Both of the dependent variables were measured using subscales of the Counselor Reaction Form. The literature identified four potential covariates for this study; two (gender and race/ethnicity) which were included in the model.

Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used to compare mean differences of the four groups created by independent variable manipulation. A main effect was found for both independent variables. The independent variable poverty status explained 5.2% of the variability in attraction scores while academic achievement explained 3.9% of the attraction score variability. Poor students were rated as more attractive clients than non-poor students while higher achieving students were rated as more attractive clients when compared to modest achieving students. Contrary to author expectations based on previous literature, neither of the

independent variables had a significant effect on disturbance score variability. Finally, no interaction was found across the two independent variables.

### *Summary of Findings*

The present study builds upon previous research focused primarily on the influence of client gender and race/ethnicity on the counseling relationship and working alliance. This study offers an initial exploration of the influence of student poverty and academic achievement on school counselor conceptualization of student variables that contribute to the quality of the counseling relationship. The two dependent variables used to measure the perceived quality of the school counselor/student relationship were client attractiveness and disturbance.

The variables perceived student poverty status and academic achievement were found to account for 5.2% and 3.9% respectively of the variance in school counselor perceptions of client attractiveness. Client attractiveness is an important component of the working alliance (Garfield, 1986; Lehman & Salovey, 1990; Tryon, Blackwell, & Hammel, 2007) and positive counseling outcomes (Castonguay, Constantino, & Holtforth, 2006).

*Poor/Non-poor Independent Variable:* School counselors who perceived students as poor were significantly more likely to be attracted to those students as clients. These higher ratings for poor students may be influenced by the school counselor feelings of self-efficacy in helping poorer students. Lehman and Salovey (1990) found that counselors are attracted to working with clients who need help the most. Developmentally, poor students are more likely than their higher class peers to be in psychological distress (Evans, 2004; Fiscella & Franks, 1997; Kessler & Cleary, 1980), display low self-esteem (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simmons, 1994), display poor social competence (Garner, Jones, & Miner, 1994), and struggle academically (Evans, 2004; Oates, 2003). It would make logical sense that counselors would be attracted to poorer

students because of their increased likelihood to need help that school counselors feel prepared to give.

Although school counselors may be attracted to working with poorer students, the students may not necessarily reciprocate that investment in the counseling relationship due to class-based cultural misunderstandings which may lead to client prompted early termination (Liu, Fridman, & Hall, 2008; Tryon, Blackwell, & Hammer, 2007). It is therefore imperative that school counselors take steps to connect with poor students in need of school counseling services. Several authors (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Lee, 2005; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007) have discussed the unique aspects of counseling school students living in poverty as well as strategies for school counselors to employ when doing so. The most common theme in these discussions is that of systemic outreach or stepping outside a typical school counselor role to assume leadership positions that interact with the poor community, modeling behavior that blocks the blame game so often attributed to school personal perspectives towards poor students, and interacting directly with the families of poor students through special outreach initiatives.

Based upon the findings of this study and the existing literature, school counselors are attracted to working with students living in poverty and in position to do so within the school system. School counselors would begin by evaluating their current caseload to determine whether or not they are working with an appropriate mix of students in terms of social class standing. If not, school counselors might develop outreach programs to connect with poor communities in their district, engage in appropriate consultation with school faculty and administration to identify poor students in need of services, and evaluate the school for areas of need where they can advocate for poorer students. These activities would not only enhance



services to poorer students but also increase counselor satisfaction with their role as they begin to work with students to whom they are more attracted.

*Modest/High Academic Achievement Independent Variable:* Several student demographic factors have been linked with poor achievement and negative school environments including poverty (Evans, 2004; Mcloyd, 1998; Oates, 2003; Trusty & Niles, 2004), race/ethnicity (Signer & Saldana, 2001; Sladen, 1982), and gender. This study found that school counselors who perceived students as being modestly prepared academically were significantly less likely to rate them as attractive clients. This finding is supported by several studies that suggest a negative reciprocal relationship between poor academic achievement and school personnel reactions to students (Bemak, 2005; Lee, 2005; Lott, 2001; Oates, 2003; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

Students who struggle academically may also view school counseling negatively when compared to higher achieving peers. Scheel & Gonzalez (2007) found that academic self-efficacy is a strong predictor of academic motivation and involvement in school counseling. The authors concluded that more motivated students seek counseling in schools while less motivated students do not. In light of the current study, it would appear that both parties in this potential counseling relationship (the school counselor and the lower academically achieving student) are averse to engaging in the process even though lower achieving students would benefit from school counseling. Scheel and Gonzalez suggest that school counselors focus on self and future awareness with low achieving students to facilitate motivation towards academic and career development. Interventions designed to identify and build upon student strengths help low-achieving students develop the sense of self-efficacy necessary to establish goals and aspirations which in turn would lead to a greater feeling of empowerment. This aspect of interventions is

important as the authors found that disempowerment was an essential element in predicting which students failed to pursue help from a school counselor.

School counselors are both ethically (ACA, 2005) and professionally (ASCA, 2005) bound to help students overcome academic achievement gaps. Although not linked in this study, social class indicators such as family income, parent occupation, and parent education have been found to be the best predictors of academic achievement. Encapsulated in the social class paradigm are parent interactions and expectations which have been shown to impact student performance (Chen, Matthews, & Boyce, 2002; Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002; Maccoby, 1980). Just like students living in poverty, effective school counselors must take a multi-level perspective towards overcoming individual and systemic biases towards low-achieving students. Given the relationship between social class, parental outlook, and academic achievement, Van Velsor and Orozcos' (2007) focus on *communitycentric* interventions seem to provide a framework for school counselors to connect with families of low academic achieving students in an effective way through outreach to both families and communities that are not achieving academically.

The absence of an interaction between the two independent variables on school counselor ratings of attraction may seem to be contradictory to what one might expect. In an interaction of the two independent variables used in the present study, Lee and Ekstrom (1987) explored the equity of school guidance services provided to disadvantaged students using *High School and Beyond* nationally representative data from the years 1980 and 1982. This study defined disadvantaged students as those from lower SES, small rural schools, and minority populations. The authors identified students who accessed two types of school counseling: 1) curriculum selection or program planning, and 2) career and college planning. Disadvantaged students were

less likely to receive counselor assistance for track and program planning and therefore less likely to be found in academic program tracks than their higher social class peers. Importantly, the authors concluded that school counseling had a significant and positive causal effect on placement in the academic track which leads one to guess that counselors met more often with higher social class students than lower social class students. These findings suggest a potential conditional effect between students from lower social classes and poor academic performance that was not found in the current study. It does suggest a need for further study and highlights the importance of school counselors in working with students who fit either, or both, descriptions.

Neither independent variable was found to have a significant effect on the dependent variable client disturbance. Client disturbance is often inversely related to the maintenance of social relationships including therapeutic ones (Hersoug, Hogland, Monsen, & Havik, 2001; Zuroff et al., 2000). This construct is most often applied to the study of perceived disturbance and its impact on the working alliance during the intake session of counseling (Tryon, 1999). Based on the previous research, one might have expected to see a significant main effect between the independent variables and client disturbance ratings. There are several possible explanations for this. School counseling is a unique counseling context in that school counselors often do not have formal intake or counseling sessions with their student clients. Furthermore, school counselors often know students in multiple contexts outside of individual counseling including through classroom guidance, participation in extracurricular activities, serendipitous meetings in the hallways, and non-therapeutic school counseling interactions.

In summary, school counselors are well-positioned in the school system to provide services to those students who are often in most need. School counselors are attracted to working

with students from poor social class backgrounds. They also are unlikely to view students from poverty, as well as those who struggle academically, as more psychologically disturbed than their high SES and academically achieving peers. One finding provides a note of caution; school counselors were found to be more attracted to working with students who were higher achieving academically than lower achievers. These outcomes suggest that attention to issues of student poverty and academic achievement provide a context within which school counselors might continue to work to close achievement gaps for traditionally underrepresented student groups.

### *Limitations*

There are several limitations to the generalizability of the study findings because of the sampling methodology and design. Random sampling was not used when recruiting participants. Internet based recruitment allowed for a sample of convenience representing a range of individual and school social class backgrounds. This method of recruitment limited the overall sample to those with access to and partiality towards participation in an on-line research study. Furthermore, the sample represented only those school counselors who belonged to national and state level professional organizations. Sample bias may explain the underrepresentation of male counselors (13.5% of the sample) as well as participants with non-Caucasian racial/ethnic identities (11.1% of the sample).

The experimental nature of the live analog design also calls the generalizability of the findings into question. It is unknown if the conditions created for this study allow the findings to be generalized to the broader practice of school counseling. The stimulus materials were created with ecological validity in mind but the presentation of the data contained in these forms may vary greatly between school systems. In fact, many school systems use paper files instead of electronic representations of new student registration forms and student transcripts.

The author is unaware of any previous study that has attempted to manipulate the variable poverty status and academic achievement in the school counseling relationship. While participants responded favorably overall to the manipulation check questions, the manipulation was more successful for those assigned to non-poor cells (97.6%) versus those assigned to poor cells (85.4%). The same can be said for the manipulation of the academic achievement variable where the manipulation was more successful for the high achieving groups (94.3%) versus the modestly achieving groups (76.7%). School counselors are, by the nature of their profession, usually non-poor and high academic achievers. This may in some part explain the presence of more successful variable manipulation for the groups typically associated with higher social class standing. In summary, it is unknown if the student poverty and academic achievement categories to which they were assigned were salient to the participants while answering the dependent variable measures or how strongly they related to the manipulation of those variables.

The instruments used for this study present another limitation. The subscales of the Counselor Reaction Form (CRF) have been used in only a few studies with relatively small samples. Furthermore, the scales were developed using psychologists and psychology interns at a university counseling center. While the profession of psychologists and counselors are related, both the professional identity and population differences act as limitations to this, the only measure available for this type of research. Second, the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status requires some interpretation on the part of the researcher when scoring from open-ended data sets. Several of the scores were derived from matching the occupations recorded by the respondent to the closest matching one in the instrument occupational profile. Although this method of scoring has been used in previous research (see Hillerbrand, 1988), interpreting scores does create an additional opportunity for scoring error.

### *Study Strengths*

The current study offers several unique strengths to the counseling literature. Issues of social class, achievement gaps, and poverty continue to permeate professional discourse (American School Counselor Association, 2005; CACREP, 2001; Lee, 2005; Trusty & Niles, 2004) while receiving little empirical attention (Constantine, 2002; Liu, Ali, et al., 2004) particularly in the area of the impact of social status on the counseling relationship for which no relevant literature was found in preparation for this study. This study marks a first attempt to empirically study phenomena that are generally accepted in the literature as important. In doing so, the difficult issue of describing the interrelatedness of poverty, socioeconomic status, and social class is also addressed in a way that might bring some order to the conceptualization of these constructs in the professional literature (Liu, Ali, et al.).

The study design and methodology offer a unique combination of methods for studying counseling phenomena. Live analog studies are often a good fit for the ethical exploration of a topic that is sensitive in nature (school counseling) or population that prohibits access (adolescents). In light of this design, several strengths emerged in this study. The population under study was full-time practicing school counselors, a population sometimes overlooked because of sampling convenience. The sample size (n=173) and research cell sizes were robust due to the on-line delivery of this study. Using Internet-based data collection was an asset because it allowed the researcher to sample participants from all over the United States, unobtrusively access professional school counselors through list-servs and discussion forums, and complete the data collection in less than two weeks time. The electronic delivery of the stimulus materials and instruments allowed for easy screening to ensure adherence to inclusion criterion, accurate random assignment of participants to research cells, the use of skip logic, the

use of forced choice questions to ensure the dependent variable scale data were collected, clean data, and the incorporation of manipulation checks of the independent variables.

### *Implications and Suggestions for Future Research*

This study suggests that there is a relationship between school counselor attraction to working with students and their perceptions of the student attributes poverty and academic preparation. The school counseling relationship is often unique in that counselor/student interaction is not defined by intake appointments, appointment times, or a set schedule. Instead, students are often referred to the counselor by school personnel, the counselor requests that the students visit the counseling office, or they meet serendipitously in the school (e.g., in the hallways or during classroom guidance lessons). The flux of this relationship increases the importance of understanding relational attraction because of these multiple points of contact, contexts, and avenues in establishing a counseling relationship.

The results of this study will benefit school counselors who manage large caseloads while meeting ethical and professional mandates to assist traditionally underrepresented students overcome achievement gaps (ASCA, 2005). By understanding their attraction biases, school counselors can enhance their own work with students while making any adjustments necessary to ensure equitable delivery of services to all students.

In applying the findings from this study regarding student poverty status, school counselors should consider two sides of the socioeconomic coin. First, poor students are often those in most need of school counselor expertise (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simmons, 1994; Evans, 2004; Fiscella & Franks, 1997; Garner, Jones, & Miner, 1994; Kessler & Cleary, 1980; Oates, 2003) and are most attractive to the school counselor as clients; yet there is some evidence that these students do not utilize counseling services at the same rates as their higher social class

peers (Lee & Eckstrom, 1987). The second side of the coin points to the antithesis of the first in that school counselors are less attracted to working with students from higher social classes. This information provides school counselors with an opportunity to evaluate their own practice to determine if they are meeting with the clients they most prefer to work with at the expense of students whom they see as less appealing while also evaluating the equity of their practice across social classes. The answers to this personal evaluation provide the practicing school counselor with a contextual foundation for identifying and addressing the needs of their students from all social class strata.

In consideration of attraction as it pertains to the counseling relationship, one must consider the attraction of both parties to the relationship. There are both practical and research implications when considering the level of attraction the student feels towards the counseling relationship, particularly that of the poor student who will inevitably be from a different social class than the school counselor (based upon the counselor's occupational title and level of education). There is evidence that a poor student may in fact be averse to establishing a counseling relationship when compared to peers from higher social classes (Tryon, 1999). A second impediment to a student's desire to establish an effective counseling relationship may be the student's perception of systemic bias in the school. Several authors have discussed the presence of the *blame game*, where students living in poverty are blamed for academic and psychosocial problems by school personnel, as well as the lack of connection between school systems and poor parents (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Lee, 2005; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). Each of these factors could impact the likelihood that poor students in need would be identified within the context of the school system or engage in help-seeking behavior.



The study also suggests that there is a relationship between school counselor perception of academic achievement and their attraction to working with students. The ASCA National Model (2005) specifically addresses the role of school counselors in closing academic achievement gaps. Understanding the role achievement plays in school counselor attraction to working with students is paramount if achievement gaps are to be closed. Haycock (2001) notes the strong relationship between poverty and underachievement across all demographic groups before suggesting that school counselors pay close attention to patterns that emerge to explain lack of achievement. In one study of these academic achievement patterns, Scheel and Gonzalez (2007) found that academic motivation and self-efficacy were strong predictors of student utilization of school counseling. The evidence suggests that academically motivated students sought out counselors while those who were not academically empowered refrained from seeking counselor help. The authors concluded that school counselors, in turn, met with the more motivated students and encouraged their continued academic pursuits while not meeting with, and therefore encouraging, those who were not as proactive in seeking help.

Practicing school counselors are challenged by the multiple demands of their job and the number of students under their purview. With the goal of closing achievements gaps and providing equitable service to all students in mind (ASCA , 2005), school counselors are mandated to find ways to bridge any service gaps between student groups and the counselor's office. By understanding the role attraction plays in creating potential gaps, school counselors can take the following proactive steps that communicate their availability to all students. First, reflect upon their own personal attraction to working with students from differing social strata and levels of academic achievement. Second, evaluate their practice to assess the equity with which they are meeting with students from different social classes and achievement levels. Third,

reach out to the students who are underserved in their practice. This outreach could be in the form of requests for meetings with individual students, classroom guidance activities, staff development programs, consultation, community outreach, and systemic advocacy efforts. Fourth, evaluate the efficacy of these enhanced efforts. Finally, implement an ongoing data-driven mechanism for monitoring progress (ASCA, 2005).

It is recommended that future research explore school counseling utilization patterns with social class and academic achievement levels included as student demographic variables, examine student prompted termination in actual school counseling settings to determine if cultural differences based on social class and academic achievement may predict this behavior, and explore the impact of school system and personnel bias on referrals and access to counseling. The practical implications of this line of research would benefit from the development of school counseling, community outreach, and school personnel training program plans to be implemented and evaluated for effectiveness.

The topics of social class, including poverty, and academic achievement continue to permeate the school counseling literature. There is great need for valid, reliable instruments for the study of social class, academic self-efficacy, and counselor perceptions as they lend to the working relationship. Future studies should continue to improve upon existing instruments such as the Counselor Reaction Form and the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Position or strive to development new instruments for the study of these topics. As discussed in Chapter 1, it is important to include social class in the multicultural school counseling worldview. Instruments such as the multicultural competence checklist for school counselors developed by Holcomb-McCoy (2004) might be developed to include items that address issues of social class, privilege, and economic oppression.

Live analog studies are important in establishing a base of knowledge in areas for which there is little research or for research in environments that are sensitive to outside intrusion. It is also important to study the school counseling relationship in its natural setting. Future studies are needed in which actual school counseling relationships are ethically studied so that a clearer understanding of the influence of individual, familial, and systemic cultural factors, including poverty, on the working alliance can be obtained. Additionally, action research should be conducted to evaluate interventions and study outcomes.

Multicultural counselor preparation should include the study of social class including a foundation in current theory, the development of personal awareness of the trainees own social class and biases, and techniques for mollifying the impact of class differences and classism in the school counseling relationship. Scholars such as Liu (2002; Liu, Ali, et al., 2004; Liu, Fridman & Hall, 2008) and Blustein (2007) continue to develop theoretical perspectives on social class that apply to the school counseling field and fit in training programs. Future research should focus on the development and evaluation of practical training paradigms and techniques that can be incorporated into counselor training and continuing education programs.

This study represents a beginning not an end. The findings suggest that there is a relationship between perceived student poverty, as well as academic achievement, and school counselor attraction to working with students. These findings suggest that there is much more to know about these phenomena. In the context of the current professional school counselor environment, there are both academic and practical implications that warrant further study in this arena. This study was but a first step on the pathway to a greater understanding of the school counselor/student relationship and the myriad of factors that influence that relationship.

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Appendix A

### Hypothetical Case Scenario

*Please imagine that you receive the following email from the lead administrator at your school regarding a tenth grade student.*

I received a telephone call from Jessie's parents today regarding their child's transition as a new student to our school. They report that Jessie is feeling lonely during unstructured time at school and out-of-place during class. The parents have observed that Jessie has been eating less and appears sad and withdrawn since the move. Could you meet with Jessie this week to check-in and review both social and academic fit here at Union High?

We have not received Jessie's permanent record from the previous school but the new student registration form and transcripts are in the permanent record file for you to look at before you meet.

*In preparation for your meeting, please review the two file documents while keeping personal/social, academic, and career development issues in mind.*

Appendix B



## New Student Registration Form - P Union Area School District

Student name: Jessie S\*\*\*\*\*  
Address of Residence: Hillside Apartments, Apt. 3  
Union, MO 10001  
Home Telephone: 555-693-6748

Father's Name: John S\*\*\*\*\*  
Address: Same  
Email: None  
Occupation: Laborer  
Last Education: Jackson High School  
Highest degree: High School Dipl.

Mother's Name: Sara S\*\*\*\*\*  
Address: Same  
Email: None  
Occupation: Cashier  
Last Education: Jackson High School  
Highest degree: High School Dipl.

Grade Student Entering: 10<sup>th</sup>  
Qualify for Free/Reduced  
Lunch Program: Yes  
Highest Math Taken: Regular Math

Appendix C

## New Student Registration Form – NP Union Area School District

Student name: Jessie S\*\*\*\*\*  
Address of Residence: 1497 Hillside Heights  
Union, MO 10001  
Home Telephone: 555-693-6748

Father's Name: John S\*\*\*\*\*  
Address: Same  
Email: JSS14@development.com  
Occupation: Development Director  
Last Education: Cornell  
Highest degree: Graduate Degree

Mother's Name: Sara S\*\*\*\*\*  
Address: Same  
Email: SSS\*\*\*@hrresource.com  
Occupation: Human Resource Rep.  
Last Education: Univ. of California  
Highest degree: Bachelor's

Grade Student Entering: 10<sup>th</sup>  
Qualify for Free/Reduced  
Lunch Program: No  
Highest Math Taken: Algebra 2

Appendix D

OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT

S\*\*\*\*, Jessie.  
 9<sup>th</sup> Grade      DOB: 4/4/1993  
 117 Oak Street  
 Union, PA 11111

Union Area School District



Union Area School District

Accredited by the State of  
 Pennsylvania D.O.E.

Richard Jones  
 Secretary of Education

Overall GPA    Total Credits    Community Serv.    Graduation Date  
 2.78                      14.00                      ---                      June 2011

Course Name	Sem1	Sem 2	Final	Credit Hrs.	
<b>07-08</b>					
<b>Coll. Math</b>	B-	C+	B-	1	
<b>Found. Hist.</b>	A-	A-	A-	1	
<b>English</b>	C	C+	C	1	
<b>Earth Sci</b>	B-	B-	B-	1	
<b>Spanish 1</b>	B	B	B	1	
<b>Comm Skill</b>	D+	C-	C-	.25	
<b>06-07</b>					
<b>Rem Math</b>	C	C	C	1	
<b>US History</b>	A-	A-	A-	1	
<b>Geometry</b>	B+	A-	A-	1	
<b>English</b>	C	C	C	1	

Pat Watkins, District Superintendent

Appendix E

## OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT

S\*\*\*\*, Jessie.  
 9<sup>th</sup> Grade      DOB: 4/4/1993  
 117 Oak Street  
 Union, PA 11111

Union Area School District



Union Area School District

Accredited by the State of  
 Pennsylvania D.O.E.

Richard Jones  
 Secretary of Education

Overall GPA    Total Credits    Community Serv.    Graduation Date  
 3.97                    14.00                    ---                    June 2011

Course Name	Sem1	Sem 2	Final	Credit Hrs.	
<b>07-08</b>					
<b>Alg. II</b>	A	B+	A-	1	
<b>Found.</b>	A	A	A	1	
<b>Hist. Glob. P.</b>	A	A-	A	1	
<b>Lit. 2</b>	B+	A	A-	1	
<b>Latin</b>	A	A	A	.5	
<b>Bio</b>	A	A	A	1	
<b>Span 3</b>	A	A	A	.5	
<b>06-07</b>					
<b>Alg. I</b>	A	A	A	1	
<b>Earth Sci</b>	A	A	A	1	
<b>Geometry</b>	B+	A-	A-	1	
<b>US History</b>	A-	A-	A-	1	
<b>Creat Write</b>	A	A	A	.5	
<b>Span 1</b>	A	A	A	.5	
<b>Span 2</b>	A	A	A	.5	

Pat Watkins, District Superintendent

Appendix F



## Letter of Invitation to the Study

Dear School Counselor,

You are invited to participate in a research study of school counselors and the counseling relationship. The purpose of the study is to investigate the perceptions school counselors may form about a student who is new to their school. If you chose to participate, you will be asked to fill out a series of questions in reaction to a hypothetical case scenario. Certain characteristics of the new student will be manipulated in the scenario as part of the research design.

If you are interested in participating, please follow the web link below to take the on-line survey. The survey should take 15-20 minutes to complete. In addition to several questions about the case scenario, the survey asks you to provide some demographic information about yourself and the school district you serve.

The information that you provide will be kept confidential as you will not be asked to identify yourself on the survey.

If you agree to participate in this study, simply go to the following link. You will be asked to read additional information about the study before accessing the survey. Please complete the online survey by March 31, 2009.

Before starting the survey please answer the following two question:

1. Are you currently working as a full-time school counselor?
2. Do you work in a middle, junior high, senior high school or the equivalent (serving any combination of the grades 6-12)?

If your answer is “Yes” to both of the above questions, please click the link below to complete the survey.

<http://TOBEDETERMINED/>

If you have questions regarding this study or would like a copy of the study results, please feel free to contact Brian Hutchison at [bzh1@psu.edu](mailto:bzh1@psu.edu) or (814) 571-4882.

Please keep this letter for your records. Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Brian Hutchison, M. Ed.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Penn State University

Appendix G



## Appendix H

### Manipulation Check Questions

Question to check the manipulation of the independent variable poor/non poor:

Which of the following best describes the student's social class background?

1. Definitely poor
2. Probably poor
3. Probably not poor
4. Definitely not poor

Question to check the manipulation of the independent variable modest/accomplished academic preparation:

Which of the following best describes the student's academic background?

1. Definitely modestly prepared
2. Probably modestly prepared
3. Probably accomplished
4. Definitely accomplished

Appendix I

## Participant Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender identity?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Transgender
3. What is your race/ethnicity?
  - a. Caucasian or Euro American
  - b. African or African American
  - c. Asian or Asian American or Asian Pacific islander
  - d. Latino/Latina/Chicano or Latino/Latina/Chicano American
  - e. Biracial or Multiracial
4. What is your highest level of education?
  - a. High school degree
  - b. Associates degree
  - c. Bachelor's degree
  - d. Master's degree
  - e. Advanced graduate degree (Ph.D., Ed.D.)
5. For how many years have you been a full-time secondary school counselor?
6. What is your current occupational title?
7. Please think of your parents/guardians and answer the questions below using your best estimate of the correct answer from when you were 14 years of age. When you were 14 years old:
  - a. What was your Father/Mother/Guardian's occupation at that time?
  - b. What was your Father/Mother/Guardian's highest level of education at that time?
  - c. (If applicable) what was the occupation of the second parent or guardian in your life at that time?
  - d. (If applicable) what was the highest level of education of the second parent or guardian in your life at that time?

Appendix J



### School Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions regarding the school where you currently work:

1. What is the name of your school district?
2. What is the name of the school where you spend the most amount of your time serving as a school counselor?
3. What is the city and zip code where your school is located?
4. What grades attend the school where you spend the most amount of your time serving as a school counselor?
5. How many total students are enrolled in the school where you spend the most amount of your time serving as a school counselor?
6. What percent of your students qualify for free/reduced school lunch?
7. Think of this ladder as representing where schools stand in society. At the top of the ladder are the schools that are best off – those who have the most money, best education, and most resources. At the bottom are the schools that are worst off – that have the least money, worst education, and the fewest resources. The higher up your school is on this ladder, the closer you are to the schools at the very top and the lower your school is, the closer you are to the bottom. Where would you put your school on the ladder? Please select the rung where you think your school stand.

[GRAPHIC IMAGE OF LADDER WILL BE IMPOSED INTO THE SURVEY]

Appendix K

## Appendix K

*Demographic Description of Sample*

	n	% of sample
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	150	86.7
Male	23	13.3
<i>Race/ethnicity</i>		
Caucasian/Euro American	153	88.4
African/African American	6	3.5
Asian/Asian American/Asian Pacific Islander	3	1.7
Latino/a or Chicano/a	7	4.0
Biracial/Multiracial	4	2.3
<i>Hollingshead social status score</i>		
Class 1 (Lowest class)	3	1.7
Class 2 (Lower middle class)	16	9.2
Class 3 (Middle class)	41	23.7
Class 4 (Upper middle class)	71	41.0
Class 5 (Upper class)	42	24.3

## Appendix K Continued

*Demographic Description of Sample*

	n	% of sample
<i>Years as secondary school counselor</i>		
2 years or less	38	22.0
3-5 years	47	27.2
6-10 years	42	24.3
11 years or more	44	25.4
Missing	2	1.2
<i>Students enrolled in counselor's school</i>		
500 or less	39	22.5
501-1,000	60	34.7
1,001-1,500	26	15.0
1,501 or more	43	24.9
Missing	5	2.9
<i>Counselor's school on social class ladder <sup>a</sup></i>		
1-2	34	19.7
3-4	66	38.2
5-6	43	24.9
7-8	25	14.5
9-10	5	2.9

<sup>a</sup> Participants were asked to rate the social standing of their school in society on a scale of 1-10 where 1 represents the schools that are best off (most money, resources, and best education) and 10 represents schools that are the worst off (least money, resources, and worst education).

BRIAN HUTCHISON

(814) 571-4882 (C)  
[bzh1@psu.edu](mailto:bzh1@psu.edu)

2468 Buchenhorst Road  
State College, PA 16801

EDUCATION

**Ph. D. – Counselor Education and Supervision (ABD)** Exp. Grad: August 2009

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park PA

Awards and Activities: **University Research Fellow** 2006-07, Chi Sigma Iota 2006-present

Additional Coursework: Completed additional 15 credits and 400 hour internship to become eligible for certification as a **secondary school counselor**.

Dissertation: *The Influence of Perceived Student Poverty on School Counselor Ratings of Disturbance and Attractiveness*

**M. Ed. - College Student Affairs/College Counseling** Grad: May 2006

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park PA

Activities: Chi Sigma Iota Honorary Counseling 2004-06/ Chapter **President** 2005-06;

College of Education Climate Committee Member 2004-06

**B. A. – Social Studies Education** Grad: May 1993

Lock Haven University, PA

CERTIFICATION STATUS

National Certified Counselor - Awaiting Exam Results

Certified School Counselor – Awaiting Certification Notification

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Journal of Counseling & Development

**EDITORIAL ASSISTANT**

August 2007 to Present

State College Area School District

**SCHOOL COUNSELING INTERN**

August 2008 – Present

The Pennsylvania State University Career Services

**CAREER COUNSELEOR**

January 2008 to May 2008

**PROGRAM/COUNSELING GRADUATE ASST.**

August 2004 to May 2006

Centre County Communities That Care

**CHILD AND FAMILY GROUP LEADER**

January to December 2007

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Niles, S.G., & Hutchison, B. (2009). Theories of career development. In K. Hughey (Ed.). *Handbook of career advising*. NACADA/Jossey-Bass.

Hutchison, B., & Niles, S.G. (2009). Career development theory. In M. A. Stebnicki, & I. Marini (Eds.). *The professional counselor's desk reference*. NY: Springer Publishing.

Hutchison, B., Niles, S. G., & Trusty, J. G. (2008). The evolution of career counseling in the schools. In G. Eliason & J. Patrick (Eds.). *Issues in career development: Career development in the schools*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Hutchison, B. (Winter 2008). Working with students from a social class perspective. *Career Developments*.